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Time of Your Life: Exploring the influence of popular messages on enactments and construals of "work-life" time

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Time of Your Life: Exploring the influence of popular messages on enactments and construals of "work-life" time

by

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Dedication

To my boys, with every adventure you take and every hurdle you cross, remember to treasure your most precious gift, time.

To my parents, always look back and know you had the time of your life. Thanks to you, I do.

For my beloved, I dedicate this work to you; for all our life times, always and forever.

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learned a great deal about the multiple experiences we all have in living out our daily lives.

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Time of Your Life: Exploring the influence of popular messages on enactments and construals of "work-life" time

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Popular messages not only illuminate many of the struggles people experience wrestling with the tensions between work and home life, but these popular texts also influence the behaviors of those who consume them. They not only reflect organizational members' experiences, but they also shape what they do. The following dissertation provides a theoretical discussion that conceptualizes and locates popular messages within dominant cultural patterns and explores the role of popular discourse in socializing organizational members. Next, "work-life" research is understood in terms of enactments and construals of time. This discussion not only develops a temporal perspective for "work-life" research, but also highlights inequalities embedded in the current "work-life" research. A narrative approach is offered as a theoretical perspective and

methodological tool for uncovering perspectives. Sixty-seven participants are interviewed, and findings suggest differing perspectives on work-life balance, work-life expectations, and the role popular messages play in shaping work-life expectations vary along gender, socioeconomic, and generational lines. Further, analyses of interview data reveal gender and socioeconomic inequalities exist within the "work-life" construct and differing construals of time.

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Chapter One

Life-Time

It was 9 p.m., and I was triumphant. My baby boy lay sleeping after a textbook-perfect bedtime routine of a bath, story time and an off-key lullaby. It was the first time Gabe had gone to sleep on his own in a week. I took full advantage of the quiet and reached for one of the trusted child-rearing books I've been reading, like every other mother I know. Big mistake. Just a few paragraphs into the new chapter, my motherly glow burst into flames. The esteemed expert who so far gently guided me through these first months suddenly went into a tirade against parents who put their children in full-time day care (which is what I do) as well as those who stay at home full time. Neither "trend" is in the best interest of the baby, he declared. Rather, he advised that we should find mythical, part-time jobs that coincide with our babies' nap-time and hire nannies to watch our children while we "work." Since becoming pregnant, I've been shocked at how everyone from authors and talk show hosts to Web sites and bumper stickers forcefully tells us how we should feed, dress and take care of our little ones.[1]

Books, web sites, magazines, television programs, newspapers, and bumper stickers not only illuminate many of the struggles people experience wrestling with the tensions between work and home, but these popular texts also influence the behaviors of those who consume them. They not only reflect organizational members' experiences, but they also shape what they do (Zorn, Page & Cheney, 2000). Many working individuals struggle with "work-life" issues, and often turn to books, web sites, magazines, seminars, and workshops to assist in this struggle. An Amazon.com search for books under business life results in a list of 310 entries for "time management" books alone. Additionally, every issue of *Parenting* magazine contains a section titled "Work+Life," while

[1] Excerpt taken from Blackwell, K. (2006). Mother Nurture. *Austin American Statesman*, December 21.

Fast Company has a dedicated "Work-Life" blogger on their website (http://blog.fastcompany.com/experts/work_life/). Moreover, a number of blogging sites have emerged as spaces for people to share their experiences managing work-life issues. As working individuals grapple with challenges related to how they should spend their time, they are surrounded by popular messages aimed at helping them in their struggles. This dissertation explores how people make sense of and are influenced by these messages. Drawing on Ballard and Seibold's (2003) meso level model of organizational temporality, it investigates how popular messages shape and are shaped by organizational members' experience of time.

Through the discourse of popular media, individuals construct expectations of organizational life and how they expect to spend their time—at work and home (Hassard, 1991; Jablin, 2001; Hall, 2005; Jamison, 2005; Munoz, 2005). In addition to shaping members' expectations about their professional and personal lives, popular discourse also functions as a tool to help organizational members as they wrestle with these issues: i.e., they turn to various popular media (books, magazines, web sites, etc.) as they engage their own "work-life" management (Fiske, 2005; Webster & Gossett, 2006). Cunliffe, Luhman, and Boje (2004) assert that "how we conceive of time has a major influence upon our ideas of what organizational life should look like" (p. 266). Part of this influence includes beliefs regarding how we *should* spend our time

(Hassard, 1991; Guins & Cruz, 2005). The influence of popular discourse is reflected in the dominant cultural patterns that Ballard and Seibold (2003) describe as central to organizational constructions of time (Flores, 2005; Jamison, 2005). It shapes members' perceptions about organizational life prior to entering a given organization and aids members throughout their careers (Hassard, 1991). Prior to even entering the workforce (Hassard, 1991), popular messages influence the vocational development process as individuals mature from childhood to adulthood. From this vantage point, popular messages help to both shape expectations of organizational life and inform current organizational practices.

Ballard and Seibold's (2003; 2006) meso level model (see Figure 1, p. 15) of organizational temporality accounts for the relationship among these issues. Particularly, it delineates the role of *dominant cultural patterns* (which shapes and is shaped by popular messages) as key to shared temporal constructions, and additionally identifies *work-home conflicts* as moderating individual organizational members' *temporal construals and enactments*. While this model describes an array of distinctions among culture (including national, regional, local, and ethnic influences), it nonetheless fails to articulate how these influences are communicated. Elsewhere, Hassard (1991) describes the vocational socialization processes that teach prospective organizational members proper (i.e., culturally sanctioned) constructions of time, beginning with their early membership in religious organizations and primary education. Yet, even

Hassard (1991) does not delve into the varied sources of these cultural messages. Findings from Webster and Gossett (2006) suggest that popular media artifacts are a meaningful, and potentially powerful, source of these messages. Thus, this dissertation seeks to problematize these messages and address this absence in extant literature. This will be accomplished through exploring organizational members' narratives about the role of popular messages in socializing and managing their personal-professional experiences of time.

In the following section, four related and complimentary arguments are advanced that guide the investigation and analysis. The first argument is that *popular messages represent both products and processes of dominant cultural patterns*. This offers a conceptualization of the practices under investigation and suggests why a narrative approach is well suited as a theoretical and methodological tool to explore the ways organizational members make sense of their experiences (Guins & Cruz, 2005; Browning & Boudes, 2005; Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Cunliffe, et al., 2004; Czarniawska, 1998; Riessman, 1993). From this perspective, narratives represent a primary tool for sensemaking. People may interpret and understand their life experiences as unfolding stories.

The second argument is that *popular messages about organizational temporality (and professional-personal time) exist prospectively, perspectively, and retrospectively*. Generational-specific discourse is crafted for organizational members beginning in childhood and extending across the life cycle (Hughes,

1971; Hassard, 1991). Thus, the study of popular messages about professional-personal time, or "work-life balance," is complimented by a panel design that spans generations.

The third argument is that *extant "work-life" research implicates the role of temporal construals and enactments as shaping and being shaped by this discourse*. This signals the need for a temporal perspective to understand the relationship between discourse and action. Finally, the fourth argument is that *"work-life" literature disproportionately considers middle-class and upper-class women*, and has largely ignored men and women in lower socio-economic groups (Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, & Buzzanell, 2003). Therefore, this current investigation explores perspectives from differing ages, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The dissertation attends to these four arguments, first, by providing a theoretical discussion that conceptualizes and locates popular messages within dominant cultural patterns and explores the role of popular discourse in socializing organizational members. Next, "work-life" research is understood in terms of enactments and construals of time. This discussion not only develops a temporal perspective for "work-life" research, but also highlights inequalities embedded in the current "work-life" research. A narrative approach is offered as a theoretical perspective and methodological tool for uncovering perspectives.

Finally, analyses of interview data reveal gender, age, and socio-economic implications.

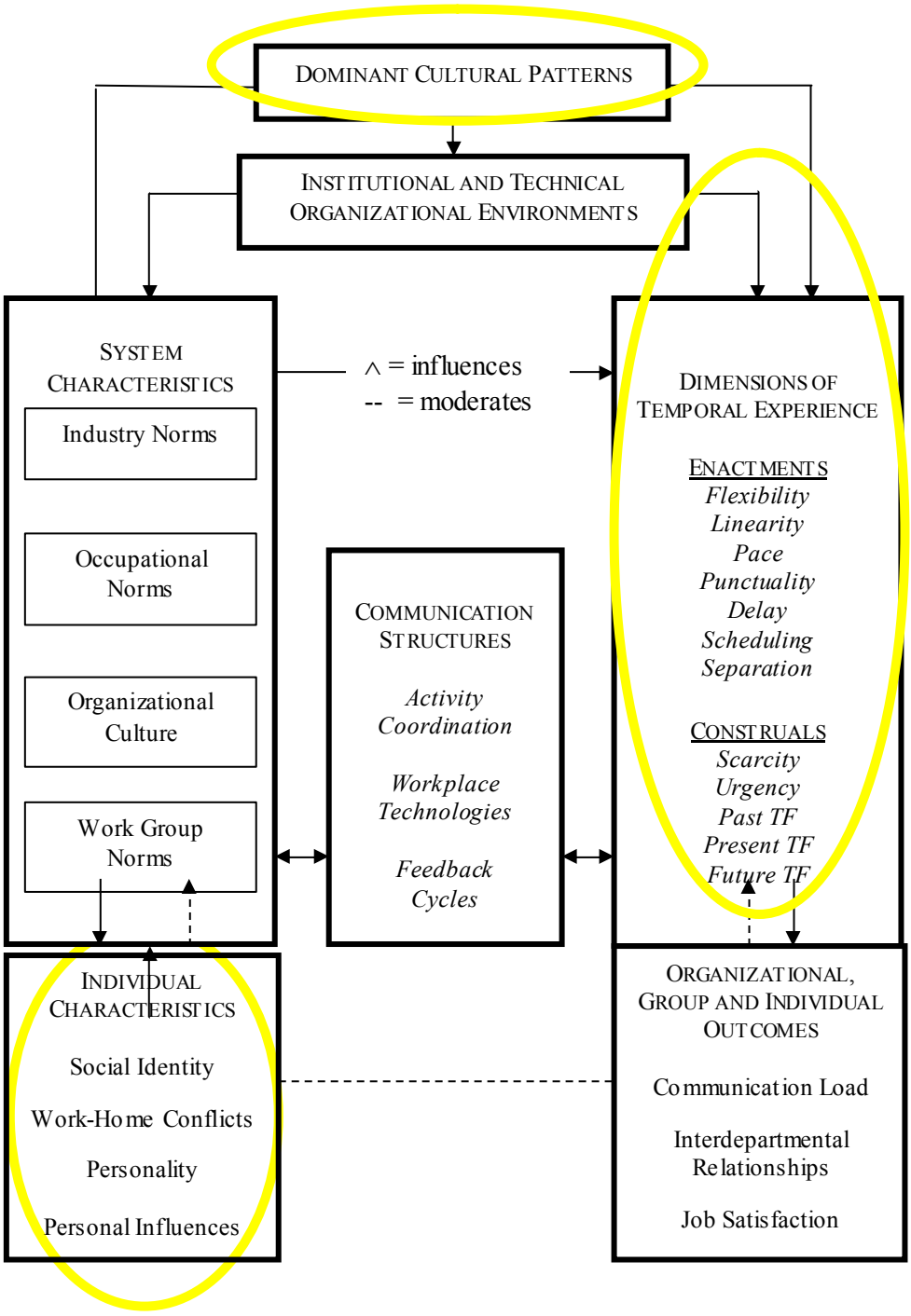
Theoretical Background and Research Questions

Time of Your Life: Popular Messages as Products and Process in Dominant Cultural Patterns

Following from Ballard and Seibold's (2003, 2006) model of organizational temporality (depicted in Figure 1), popular discourse is a critical site from which to begin exploring organizational members' temporal construals and enactments. It both shapes and is shaped by the dominant cultural patterns, yet is more nuanced, dynamic, and sensitive to momentary historical fluctuations. "From a meaning-centered approach, discourses of work and family are inherited and situated in historical contexts. These forms constrain and facilitate thought and action regarding the contextual categories of *family*, *work*, and *organization*" (Kirby et al., 2003, p. 2). These "thoughts" are reflected in members' temporal construals, or conceptions of time (described further in the next section), and these "actions" represent diverse temporal enactments or performances of time (also described in more detail in the following section) (Ballard & Seibold, 2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2006). Labeled as "the art of timing" (Flores, 2005, p. 75), popular discourse exists at the nexus of historical and/or traditional conventions and contemporary practices. Thus, popular discourse is a ready source of culturally-based messages and allows us to consider

Figure 1

Meso Level Model of Organizational Temporality



differences across time and generations in social constructions of workplace temporality, including the emergence and performance of "work-life" discourse (Flores, 2005). This embeddedness in tradition and history highlights popular discourse's cultural basis while its contemporary origins draw attention to popular messages as both a *product* and *process* of discourse, ideas treated next.

Popular messages as a product. In the present, popular messages represent products or artifacts available for organizational members to consume. Whereas many scholars distinguish between high and mass culture, Jameson (2005) posits that we engage a contemporary film, classic novel, or musical ballad with the same level of preoccupation. For instance, a manager of an organization may read through "work-life" blogging sites and popular management books with the same level of intensity and interest. Likewise, an organizational member might engage an episode of *The Apprentice* with a similar level of involvement that he or she would bring to a Stephen Covey workshop. Much like Seabrook (2001), Jameson (2005) and Flores (2005) illustrate a society void of high and low brow cultures. "Rather than marking of boundaries and defining separate spheres of cultural practices, perhaps popular culture is about the traversing and transgressing of them, and characterized by a dialogic among classes and social sectors, such as popular and non-popular, high and low, restricted and mass" (Flores, 2005, p. 74). Based on these perspectives, popular messages can be viewed as products mass produced, consumed by people of varying

socioeconomic classes and races, and characterized by the relationships within and between consumer classes, races, and cultures. The same books, music, and movies may be consumed by people of different genders, races, socio-economic classes, and organizational interests. Thus, the inclusion of artifacts ranging from music and web sites to magazines and popular press management books is critical to understanding experiences of organizational members from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, organizational positions, and industries. Moreover, organizational member have an enormous amount of products from which to choose.

The choice to use one product over another becomes an important factor in exploring organizational members' uses and experiences with popular discourse. For Fiske (2005), the study of popular messages should reflect on popular discrimination. He describes that "the products of capitalism always exceed the needs of the people, so popular discrimination begins with the choice of which products to use" (p. 216). Through discrimination, people position some artifacts as more important, more meaningful, and more useful than others. Discrimination highlights subjectivities which "demonstrate a complex relationship between fans and audiences of popular culture and the commodities they claim, consume/produce, use, assign value to, identify with/through, and make 'meaning' with in everyday life" (Guins & Cruz, 2005, p. 212). For instance, an employee may choose to read *Who Moved My Cheese?* (2002) rather

than *From Good to Great* (2001) because the lessons learned from the former book offer more applicability to her work life. From this perspective, organizational members consume popular discourse *because of* the significant meanings and usefulness to their work and home lives.

Fiske (2005) continues in this vein by insisting that popular messages or art be functional. "This functionalism of art, like its relevance, works to pluralize meanings, pleasures, and uses of the text, for it must serve different functions for different socially situated readers" (p. 217). That is, people engage in popular discrimination as long as the commodities appear relevant and productive in aiding their social situations. In the case of "work-life" popular messages, a working father might participate on the "This Dad Blogs" website (http://www.thisdadbolgs.blogspot.com/) instead of reading *Working Mother Magazine*. Whereas, he may feel similar and connected to members on the blogging site, he may not relate to women featured in the magazine. People consume popular discourse because they identify, relate to, and find meaning in the commodities they consume. Instead of viewing popular messages as purely a form of social control (Carlone, 2001; Shiach 2005), Hall (2005) argues "there are also elements of recognition and identification, something approaching a recreation of recognizable experiences and attitudes, to which people are responding" (p. 68). While consuming popular messages, organizational members construct meaning and choose to incorporate, distort, resist, negotiate,

or recuperate (Hall, 2005, p. 69) meaning into their own lives. That is, through meaning construction we may choose to identify with styles and identities presented within popular texts or we may choose to "disidentify" (Munoz, 1999; Smith, 2005).

Relying on Jameson (2005), incorporation and identification may result from an engagement with popular discourse.

> The passionate attachment one can form to this or that pop single, the rich personal investment of all kinds of private associations and existential symbolism which is the feature of such attachment, are fully as much a function of our own familiarity as of the work itself: the pop single, by means of repetition, insensibly becomes part of the existential fabric of our own lives, so that what we listen to is ourselves, our own previous auditions (p.123).

Popular messages shape styles and identity by opening space for incorporation, distortion, resistance, and negotiation of identities and styles (Hall, 2005; Munoz, 2005). From this perspective, the consumer becomes an important locus of knowledge and experience. Thus, how organizational members, as consumers, use and make sense of popular discourse becomes especially interesting.

Popular messages as a process. While viewing popular messages as products is important, these cultural forms and artifacts do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they exist in a dynamic relationship between objects, signifiers,

and social actors. For instance, a best selling novel represents a commodity for sale and consumption; but the messages and signs surrounding the book may construct a reality which transcends the artifact itself. When we consume popular messages, we construct meaning within a web of historical, cultural, ideological, and material relationships. "Viewers, listeners and readers do their own symbolic work on a text and create their own relationships to technical means of reproduction and transfer" (Willis, 2005, p. 243). Thus, artifacts may not only signify current cultural trends, but also construct a reality for the consumer (Webster & Gossett, 2006). For instance, the lyrics within the song *I'm a Woman*, "I can bring home the bacon and fry it up in a pan," might on the one hand provide commentary on the role of women, culturally, in the workplace. On the other hand, these same lyrics might also motivate a woman as she encounters work and home demands. Existing within dominant cultural patterns, popular messages become used and appropriated by organizational members.

Popular discourse, then, is not only a product, but also a process. Meanings of particular artifacts and discourse unfold through the historical and practical use of the artifact or discourse. In the words of Guins and Cruz (2005):

> It is necessary to contend with the interconnection of both its [commodities] material and ideological capacities. Because the commodity, the modern unit of exchange, is the site where value and

> meaning cohere and are contested, it bears upon how we understand the objects that surround us and through which we negotiate our relationship to the culture that surrounds us (p. 83).

Popular discourse emerges as we consume, make sense of, and assign meaning to commodities. As a process, popular messages represent "a complex idea of signifying 'practice,' performance, and institutional process" (Flores, 2005, p. 74). The question for many scholars of popular discourse becomes, "What do people make of their encounters with media and commodities- artifacts of mass culture?" (Guins & Cruz, 2005, p. 211). We symbolically construct meaning of our lives through our act of consumption. Willis (2005) agrees suggesting, "For symbolic work and creativity mediate, and are simultaneously expanded and developed *by*, the uses, meanings and 'effects' of cultural commodities. Cultural commodities are catalysts, not products; a stage in, not the destination of, cultural affairs" (p. 242). Commodities exist within the dynamic interchange between consumers, producers, industries, histories, and institutions. For example, a number of popular management books exist for organizational members to choose from because of the dominant cultural norm and belief that organizational members *should* read books on managing organizational life (Webster & Gossett, 2006). By asking organizational members about their choices and uses of artifacts, this current investigation seeks to discover how dominant cultural patterns shape members' experience of organizational life.

Not only do popular messages provide organizational members utility in meeting work and home demands, but as a process these products also shape members' expectations of organizational life.

In Our Own Time: Popular Culture and Organizational Temporality Across the Life Cycle

From early childhood, people begin acquiring messages about organizational life (Hassard, 1991). These messages come from a variety of sources such as family members, schools, friends, past part-time jobs, and media (Jablin, 2001). Together, these sources form expectations, beliefs, and socialize us to form assumptions concerning how people interact in organizations (Jablin, 2001). Popular discourse, much like other environmental agents, shapes notions of *social* time such that organizational members learn proper and correct times for certain thoughts and actions (Hassard, 1991). For instance, after reading a popular press book on time management an organizational member may learn the value of multi-tasking in order to be a successful team member at work and parent at home. This learning process occurs prospectively prior to entering organizations (Jablin, 2001), perspectively as members struggle through work and home demands, and retrospectively as organizational members make sense of their experiences (Weick & Ashford, 2001). Because cultural patterns change over time, an interesting element to consider is how popular messages change generationally. Socializing messages about work for one generation may be

different for other generations (Jablin, 2001). Likewise, uses and meanings of artifacts may differ across generations. One generation may be more apt to turn to popular messages for useful tools in managing personal and professional time. Exploring the ways popular discourse shapes organizational members' constructions and performances of time emphasizes the relationship between cultural messages, thoughts, and actions.

The following section explores this relationship between messages, thoughts, and actions by placing a temporal lens on existing "work-life" literature. Framing "work-life" research in terms of enactments and construals of time highlights the recursive relationship between thoughts and actions. Moreover, this frame also helps to conceptualize the "work-life" discussion in terms of organizational temporality. "Work-life" conflicts, imbalances, and struggles are temporal issues.

It's About Time: "Work-Life" and Organizational Temporality

A variety of factors affect organizational members' experiences of time. Organizational temporality includes the historical, cultural, environmental, institutional, occupational, and individual forces enabling and constraining experiences of time (Ballard & Seibold, 2006; Ballard & Seibold, 2004b). As such, time becomes viewed not only as an objective, measurable entity, but also as a subjective and intersubjective construction (Ballard & Seibold, 2006; Cunliffe, Luhman, and Boje, 2004; Ballard & Seibold, 2005; Levine, 1997; Hernadi, 1992).

While objective time stems from environmental pacers (Ballard & Seibold, 2006) such as a time clock and work quarters, subjective time evolves through individual experiences of time. However, we also construct time through shared interactions. For Ballard and Seibold (2006), "Intersubjective time is social-or shared-and, as such, is constituted through interaction among members of a given group or culture" (p. 319). Hence, experiences of time will arise based upon objective, subjective, and intersubjective constructions. The answer to the question, "How should we spend our time," is influenced by organizational rules and norms, individual perceptions and preformances, and meanings created through interactions with others. Further, answers to the question depend upon our enactments and construals of time.

Enactments of time refer to the performance of time (Ballard & Seibold, 2006; 2005; 2004a; 2004b; 2000) along eight different dimensions. For instance, *flexibility* ascribes to the level of rigidity involved in the scheduling of time for completing of tasks (Ballard & Seibold, 2006; 2005; 2004a; 2004b; 2000; Starkey, 1989). Similarly, *scheduling* refers to the extent to which the sequence and duration of activities become "formalized or improvised" (Ballard & Seibold, 2006; 2005; 2004a; 2004b; 2000; Zerubavel, 1981). In addition, *pace* corresponds to the speed or tempo of activities and *punctuality* pertains to the precision involved in timing and deadlines (Ballard & Seibold, 2006; 2005; 2004a; 2004b; 2000; Levine, 1988; Lauer, 1981). Whereas some deadlines are marked by considerable

promptness, others are seen as more fluid. Contrasting punctuality, *delay* refers to "working behind schedule" (Ballard & Seibold, 2006, p. 321). Just as the performance of meeting deadlines might vary, the performance of task completion might vary as well. *Linearity* relates to the degree with which individuals complete one task at a time (Ballard & Seibold, 2006; 2005; 2004a; 2004b; 2000; Hassard, 1996). Finally, the amount of interruptions or intrusions into work activities might affect the successful completion of such activities (Perlow, 1997). As an enactment of time, *separation* involves the extent to which environmental or extraneous factors "are eliminated or engaged in the completion of a work task" (Ballard & Seibold, 2005, p.6).

Construals of time differ from enactments in that construals "represent the way organizational members 'interpret' or orient to time" (Ballard & Seibold, 2006, p. 321). Further, construals evolve through subjective and intersubjective experiences. Rather than view construals as just an individual, psychological process, "construals focus attention on the social process of deriving meaning and open up the possibility of shared interpretations as well" (Ballard & Seibold, 2006, p. 322). Our construals of time vary according to our interpretations of *scarcity* and *urgency* (Ballard & Seibold, 2006; 2005; 2004a; 2004b; 2000) as well as our temporal focus toward *past*, *present,* and *future* (Ballard & Seibold, 2006; 2005). From a scarcity perspective, time is viewed as an exhaustible and limited resource (Ballard & Seibold, 2006; 2005; 2004a; 2004b; 2000; Karau & Kelly, 1992).

We might develop such a perspective as we experience multiple demands being placed within a limited amount of time such as working long hours and spending too few hours on personal interests. Additionally, an urgency perspective is characterized by "a preoccupation with task completion and deadlines" (Ballard & Seibold, 2006, p. 322). Whereas an urgent perspective emphasizes task completion, scarcity is focused on the limited amount of time with which to complete such a task (Ballard & Seibold, 2004b).

Construals of time also consist of temporal focus as well. These differing temporal foci vary according to how individuals orient to the past, present, and future time. That is, these three foci differ according to the degree of emphasis placed on previous, present or distant events (Ballard & Seibold, 2005; Bluedorn, 2002). For some, past events heavily impact present constructions of time (Ballard & Seibold, 2004a; 2004b; Gherardi & Strati, 1998). Thus, our focus on the past shapes how we interpret and enact time in the preset. For example, an organizational member might retrospectively look to past mistakes and change current enactments. Likewise, our orientation toward the present or future also impacts our enactments of time. Jones (1988) expands on the differences between present and future time.

> We can distinguish between time as a structured, unitized measure of the sequence of unfolding events, compelled toward some distant outcome, and time as the backdrop for behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. The

> former is a conception of action that occurs within a time that flows linearly, inexorably, and necessarily forward. It is a perspective that is strongly guided by the future. The latter is a feeling of behavior that occurs in-time, where time consciousness is suspended and action occurs in the infinite present (p. 26).

These varying foci help to understand differing orientations toward long-term planning of events versus more moment to moment reactions to events (Ballard & Seibold, 2004b).

While enactments and construals of time differ, the relationship between the two constructs remains important. Our orientation or interpretation of time shapes how we perform time; yet, our performances of time also impact our construal and relationship to time. For example, as a college instructor, I only have a certain number of days to teach an entire course within a semester. Perceiving a scarce amount of "free time," I emphasize punctuality and the importance of scheduling all class days. Thus, my construal of time impacts how I perform my class time. Interestingly, enactments may also influence construals. Because I engage in strict scheduling of the semester, I maintain a future orientation to the teaching of the course. I view each class day as an event unfolding "toward some distant outcome" (Jones, 1988, p.26). Recursively, our interpretation of time impacts our performance of time which shapes our conception of time.

Even though not all of the "work-life" literature explicitly implicates time as inextricably linked to "work-life" issues, placing a temporal lens upon existing research provides a unifying view illustrating temporal dimensions. Using the aforementioned constructs of enactments and construals, we can situate current "work-life" literature within the model of organizational temporality (Ballard & Seibold, 2003). Doing so highlights the connection between thoughts and actions. As previously noted above, construals and enactments recursively interact. Thoughts influence behaviors and vice versa. Moreover, the discussion of popular discourse as a product and process underscores the impact of cultural messages on these enactments and construals of time. The following two sections will situate current "work-life" research according to enactments and construals and discuss possible impacts popular messages have on enactments and construals of time.

Temporal enactments. Scholars explicitly mentioned time within some of the "work-life" research; although, researchers do not use the construct of *temporal enactment* while implicating time. Throughout many of the articles researchers discuss how people perform and enact time within and across the boundaries of their personal and professional lives. "Work-life" research yields a number of studies in which scholars explore enactments of scheduling, flexibility, pace, and linearity despite the interdisciplinary nature of the research. Moreover, many of the studies implicate multiple enactments simultaneously

rather than individually. We perform time along multiple dimensions simultaneously.

Notions of "work-life balance" and "work-life" conflict both speak to enactments of time. Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2002) frame time as the root to achieving balance and balance as the desired outcome between the work-life relationship. They state, "To be balanced is to approach each role-work and family- with an approximately equal level of attention, time, involvement, or commitment" (p. 512). The authors assume balance emerges as individuals perform their personal and professional activities with the same level of flexibility, scheduling, and pace. In contrast, Perrons, Fagan, McDowell, Ray, and Ward (2005) contend 'balance' refers to the ways individuals organize their total workloads based on different expectations and preferences. Rather than view balance as the outcome of the equal performance of time, individuals achieve balance by negotiating the degree and extent to which they perform flexibility, scheduling, pace, separation, and linearity within and across spaces of professional and personal life. From both perspectives, balance occurs through the performance of time. For organizational members, conceptions of balance become learned through books and workshops aimed at teaching them how to achieve it. By changing their current enactments of time, members may find balance they seek.

"Work-life" and "life-work" conflicts may also be understood according to enactments of time (Reynolds, 2005; Eagle, Miles, & Icenogle, 1997; Greenaus & Parasuraman, 1999). Reynolds (2005) offers a clear description of his perspective of work-life conflict.

> Work-life conflict exists when work activities interfere with personal or family activities or vice versa. In other words, work-life conflict can originate in the home or in the work environment…Sometimes, personal or family life may interfere with work (hereafter life-to-work conflict). Staying home to care for a sick relative, for example, may prevent someone from meeting a deadline at work. Work schedules, however, tend to be less flexible than personal schedules and it is more common for work to interfere with life (here after work-to-life conflict). A late business meeting, for instance, may make it impossible to attend a child's dance recital (p. 1314).

Through his language use, "staying home," "work schedules," "less flexible," "personal schedule," "late," and "attend," Reynolds positions "work-life" and "life-work" conflicts as temporal issues. Accordingly, people experience conflict due to their performance of time at home and work. Baldock and Hadlow (2004) contend that "work-life" conflicts can be best understood as a "scheduling problem" (p. 706). That is, the difficulties facing most of the 246 respondents in their study stem from scheduling and coordinating their work and care activities.

Additionally, Bacik and Drew (2006) and Bacik, Costello, and Drew (2003) mention the culture of long hours and inflexibility of work scheduling as key factors in the limited number of female lawyers in high ranking positions. Further, Reynolds's (2005) empirical study found that "work-life" conflict increases the chances women will want to decrease the number of hours they work regardless of the origin of the conflict; however, men desire to decrease their number of hours only when the conflict stems from work. In other words, as men and women experience conflict resulting from their enactments of time, they may choose to change the ways they schedule, pace, or their degree of flexibility. Popular discrimination (Fiske, 2005) becomes important as men and women experience "work-life" conflicts in different ways and seek out different avenues for help in changing enactments.

Anxo and Boulin (2006) call for new forms of time organizations and management to address current work-life issues. They contend that time management strategies encouraging more employee control might contribute to greater "work life balance" (p. 319). Additional research investigates how individuals search for the right formula for managing work and life commitments (Kirby et al., 2003; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). As people experience time poverty (Hoschild, 1997), they may turn to time management books looking for expert advice on managing and coping strategies. Larsson and Sanne (2005) analyzed self-help books on avoiding time shortage and discovered

categories relating to enactments of time. For instance, books address specific strategies such as streamlining activities, buying services, and setting limits. These strategies encourage readers to multi-task, spend less time on certain projects, speed up the time it takes to complete some tasks, and become more flexible with the completion of work. Time management strategies support changing the performance of time in order to cope with or manage "work-life" struggles.

Since some scholars frame scheduling and flexibility as key to understanding "work-life" conflicts, many researchers explore ways organizations accommodate employees by offering alternative workplaces and flexible scheduling (Hill, Jackson, & Martinengo, 2006; Mirchandani, 1998; Pleck, 1993; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Mallia & Ferris, 2000; Hoschild, 1997; Gilbert, 1993; Allen & Russell, 1999; Auerbach, 1988; Smithson and Stokoe, 2005; Perrons, et al., 2005). Interestingly, alternative scheduling and flexibility with working time challenge assumptions of *face-time,* or the amount of time spent at work (Perlow, 1995, 1997; Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996). Perlow (1995) argues our culture assumes a direct connection exists between the amount of time spent at work and our contribution to work. Popular messages socialized members to believe the organization has prime claim to employee time (Hassard, 1991). The performance of activities in terms of pace, linearity, separation, punctuality, scheduling, and flexibility within the boundaries of workplaces becomes equated

with commitment and productivity (Kirby et al., 2003). Yet, new technological advances challenge such assumptions (Bailyn, 1992; Perlow, 1995, 1997; Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996). Technology blurs traditional boundaries of workspaces such that face-time becomes contested in order to offer flexibility in scheduling (Nippert-Eng, 1996b; Richter, 1990). A number of research studies address the enabling and constraining aspects of technology in relation to the performance of time.

Technology allows for the blurring of spatial and temporal boundaries such that personal and professional enactments of time intertwine (Page, Hylmo, & Newsom, 2004; Kirby et al., 2003; English-Lueck, 2002). This blurring marks an increase in the amount of flexibility experienced and autonomy in scheduling, pace, and separation. Because of technology, flexible working conditions become easy, reasonable, and cost-effective (Greenblatt, 2002). Further, technology structures time (Dubinskas, 1988). Perrons (2003) discovered "new media creates new opportunities for people to combine interesting paid work with caring responsibilities" by allowing for flexible working patterns (p. 65). Additional empirical evidence suggests the flexibility increase brought on by technology positively affects telecommuting employees. Kossek, Lautsch, and Eaton (2006) found psychological job control in scheduling and flexibility significantly lowered turnover intentions, family-work conflict, and depression. The more employees perceived to have control over their enactments of work

activities, the less conflict they experience. Similarly, Golden, Veiga, and Simsek (2006) also explored the relationship between telecommuting and "work-life conflict." Their survey results suggest that the more extensively employees work in telecommuting capacities, the lower their work-to-family conflict, but the higher their family-to-work conflict. These findings highlight the role technology plays in influencing our enactments of time (Ballard & Seibold, 2006; 2005; 2004a; 2004b; 2000). By using technology, we can arrange unique working schedules, work during *off hours (*non-traditional working hour), set individualized pace, and determine levels of flexibility.

While some of the research on technology and "work-life" illustrates the enabling features technology provides for employee enactments of time, other literature illuminates potential constraining forces. Thus, technology can be viewed contradictory as not only empowering employees by increasing autonomy and flexibility in scheduling, pace, linearity, and separation, but it also can exploit and control employees (Kirby et al., 2003; Broadfoot, 2001). From a critical perspective, Kirby et al. (2003), posit "new technologies are the apparatus through which employers intrude across boundaries into their employees' personal lives to extract ever increasing amounts of time and energy (p. 8). Likewise, Broadfoot (2001) suggests that by dissolving all boundaries, the virtual workplace encourages both a "workaholic heaven and workaholic hell" where employees feel autonomy and controlled simultaneously (p. 113). On the one

hand, technology enables workers by eliciting a sense of freedom in scheduling, pace, and flexibility because work can get done virtually anywhere at any time. On the other hand, workers can become constrained by working all the time. Viewed as a way to exploit employees, technology becomes a constraining force limiting or controlling employee enactments of time. Likewise, our cultural acceptance and endorsement of technology reinforces these enabling and constraining features.

Regardless of the researchers' perspective on the impact technology has on "work-life" issues, the current research can be usefully understood in terms of how technology impacts enactments of time. Communication technologies influence not only how individuals perform work and home according to scheduling, speed, flexibility, linearity, and separation, but communication technologies also impact organizations and larger societal institutions as well. Likewise, popular messages about technology use also impact our enactments of time. For instance, a recent Verizon wireless advertisement suggests getting moms a "Wireless Makeover" as "Solutions for freedom and flexibility to work anywhere" (http://news.vzw.com/news/2007/05/pr2007-05-10.html). Through this "makeover," a mother could conceivably conduct work at the park while watching her children play. Not only does this advertisement address enactments of time, but this ad also highlights the role technology plays in impacting our enactments. Moreover, this ad helps provide the link between

messages, thoughts, and actions by suggesting wireless products can help modify existing behaviors. Thus, technology helps to shape and is shaped by views of expected and appropriate behavior for how we should perform our time. Undoubtedly, new communication technologies have changed the way we experience our private and professional lives.

In addition to new communication technologies, organizational programs and "work-life" initiatives have also influenced how we perform time (Hoschild, 1997). Most of the research surrounding employee use of policies and benefits fall along gender lines. That is, many of the empirical studies assess similarities and differences between men and women in family-leave-taking, flexibility, pace, linearity, and scheduling. For instance, women are more likely than men to take a leave of absence because of family-related issues (Sandberg, 1999; Kim, 1998). Likewise, Bailyn, Fletcher, and Kolb (1997) discovered that men, single workers, and career-focused women are more likely to underutilize benefits offered by their organizations because of the negative connotations and consequences of using such policies (Allen & Russell, 1999). These findings point to the impact gender, marital status, organizational and societal messages, as well as career ambitions may have on employee enactments of time. Traditionally, societal messages have not encouraged men to take paternity leave (Hoschild, 1997; Kirby et al., 2003). Because of the perceived repercussions of using extended maternity/paternity leave or part-time working arrangements, a man or woman

may decide to pass on the opportunity. However, some working individuals may not even have such opportunities.

Additional articles explore gender relations along temporal lines. For instance, in an extensive study of dual-earning families, Moen and Yu (2000) discovered that strategies employed to manage work-life pressures, work conditions, and perceptions of life quality are gendered. More specifically, they reported, more men work in paid, longer hour professional careers, women experience more stress and overload than men, and women feel less apt to cope with the work-life pressures. Similarly, MacDonald, Phipps, and Lethbridge (2005) discovered women's greater number of hours spent on unpaid work contributes to their experience of more stress than men. Both studies explore the amount of performance time spent doing paid and unpaid work. Additionally, they discover gender inequalities related to various enactments of time. Moreover, cultural, social, institutional, and economic pressures might contribute to these different enactments of time. Specifically, cultural messages socialize men and women to enact appropriate and proper behaviors in organizations (Hassard, 1991). Although research highlights differences in ways men and women perform professional and private time, little empirical research explores the impact and differences of popular messages on these enactments of time (Kirby et al., 2003). Scholars have interrogated the content of socializing messages (Jablin, 2001), but little research investigates organizational members'

sensemaking and how these messages influence enactments of time (Kirby et al., 2003).

In addition to a disparity along gender lines, current research also lacks in a diversity of perspectives among different socioeconomic classes. A number of articles focus on the gender and class implications of part-time work. Here, dynamic and flexible scheduling remains accessible for privileged, upper class women. Swanberg, Pitt-Catsouphes, and Drescher-Burke (2005) examined accessibility of flexible schedules and reported that lower wages, lower education, and hourly work reduced employee's access to flexible work schedules. Likewise, Warren (2004) investigated financial positions and the choices of leisure activities of women working in full and part-time jobs to reveal "a less positive picture" of the life-balancing of lower level part-time female workers (p. 99). Both studies highlight the *in*flexibility part-time schedules may provide women, particularly women of lower income levels. Moreover, Tomlinson (2006) explored the paradox created when women choose to transition to part-time work following paternity leave. Findings indicate women face adverse conditions in the maintenance of careers as well as future labor market prospects. These studies indicate the need to address gender and socioeconomic differences in "work-life" enactments of time. These differences emerge as important findings in much of the research; however, focus over the past decade has been on middle to upper class women (Kirby et al., 2003). Few

research projects have interviewed men or women of lower socioeconomic status (Kirby et al., 2003).

Thus far, much of the work-life literature explicitly addressing time focuses on the performance of time. That is, of the research directly implicating time in reference to work-life conflict, work-life balance, face-time, new communication technologies, gender, class, and time management highlights various enactments of time regarding pace, linearity, scheduling, separation, and flexibility. Additionally, gender, technology, socioeconomics, and culture emerge as recurrent themes in the research. Specifically, differences in enactments of time vary according to gender and socioeconomic status. Moreover, culture shapes these different enactments. However, the above review is not exhaustive of the "work-life" literature. In fact, a tremendous amount of research exists within this same heading, but time is not explicitly discussed. Rather, additional research implicitly centers on time as researchers discover how people *perceive* they should be spending their time. These perceptions shape and are shaped by our construals of time.

Work-Life and Construals of Time. Recall, construals represent the way people orient, interpret, or perceive time (Ballard & Seibold, 2006; 2005; 2004a; 2004b; 2000). Moreover, these interpretations shape and are shaped by objective, subjective, and intersubjective conceptions of time. Within work-life research, many scholars address work-life issues but do not mention time as an important

factor to consider. Rather than implicate time explicitly, researchers often discuss topics such as boundaries, roles, identities, policy implementation, and social responsibilities. Despite the lack of emphasis on time, much of this work-life research questions how individuals, organizations, and society perceive we should be spending our time.

"Work-life" research on boundaries investigates the extent to which we separate time spent between different spheres of work and home life. For some, boundaries consist of actual physical locations; yet, for others, boundaries exist as psychological or social constructions (Hoschild, 1997; Kanter, 1977; Nippert-Eng, 1996b; O'Keefe, 1997; Kirby et al., 2003). Regardless of the definition of "work-life" boundaries, the research explores how organizational members perceive they should be spending their time within and across boundaries. For instance, a number of studies connect the amount of talk about family within work boundaries and the perception that to do so reduces the appearance of commitment at work (Jorgenson, 2000; Kirby, 2001; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Nippert-Eng, 1996b). Employees interpret the workplace as an inappropriate space to discuss family or personal commitments (Kirby et al., 2003). These interpretations may stem from organizational norms and expectations (Farley-Lucas, 2000), interactions with coworkers (Kirby & Krone, 2002), or social/cultural messages (Hassard, 1991). For example, an employee may read a book on how to talk at work and learn that work is an inappropriate place to

discuss home affairs. In all, employees construe the workplace as an urgent site for the completion of tasks and meeting deadlines. Construals of time impact how organizational members spend their time within work boundaries.

Construals of time may also impact how individuals spend their time outside of work. Some scholars research the extent to which tasks of one domain intrude into another (Hoschild, 1997; Nippert-Eng, 1996b) and how notions of boundaries perpetuate gender inequalities by positioning public as masculine and private as feminine (Chow & Berheide, 1988; Gerstel & Gross, 1987; Osmond, 1996; Thorne, 1992). From these perspectives, time is viewed as scarce. That is, working individuals perceive that time is limited and exhaustible. The "intrusion" takes time away from those who cannot afford to loose time (Hoschild, 1997; Kirby et al., 2003). Likewise, the inequality of time positions equality as scarce, valuable, and desired. Experiencing time as limited and important shapes conceptions of appropriate uses of time across and within boundaries. Boundaries, however, become problematic as new communication technologies blur distinctions between work and home (Kirby et al., 2003). As such, construals of time become impacted by technology use (Ballard & Seibold, 2006; 2005; 2004a; 2004b; 2003; 2000).

Just as new communication technologies influence enactments of time, they also impact construals of time. Rather than view work and home boundaries as separate spheres, some scholars explore the social construction of

boundaries and how communication technologies reconstitute time and space (English-Lueck, 2002; Kirby et al., 2003; Broadfoot, 2001). As technologies blur the lines of traditional boundaries, our interpretations of time become dialectical. Employees may perceive the urgency of meeting deadlines and remaining task-centered because technology keeps them constantly wired and tapped into the organization (Braodfoot, 2001). However, because we are always wired into work, time outside of work task completion becomes seen as precious and scarce. Thus, technology shapes and becomes shaped by construals of time depending on our desired level of connectedness between our personal and professional domains. Some scholars refer to this level of connectedness as integration-segmentation where integration indicates no distinction between work and home and segmentation involves separating work and non-work physically and temporally (Nippert-Eng, 1996a; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2005).

Much of the research on integration-segmentation discusses the permeability of boundaries and inter-role conflict (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2005; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2005) individuals experience as they juggle demands of home and work (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Lambert & Kossek, 2005; Nippert-Eng, 1996a, 1996b; Valcour & Hunter, 2005; Chow & Berheide, 1988; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Time is viewed as scarce; working individuals do not have enough time to spread among their varying roles. Kirby et al. (2003) define roles within the "work-life" literature as "discrete entities or

aspects that must be 'balanced' or constrained within boundaries in order to avoid conflict" (p. 11). Studies on role balancing and conflict aim to discover optimal conditions which lead to satisfaction and reduced conflict (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), explore the managing of multiple roles (Marks & MacDermid, 1996), correlate work commitment and role strain (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1993; O'Neil & Greenberger, 1994), and relate family role commitment to psychological well-being (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992). By focusing on the roles individuals play within and across boundaries, researchers hint at assumptions individuals make regarding appropriate uses of their time. For instance, Greenberger and O'Neil (1993) found that fathers who have a strong commitment to their work experienced greater role conflict and strain in their roles as parents and spouses. This finding suggests men place importance on the time they spend playing their various roles of employee, father, and husband. They interpret all three roles to be significant; thus, they experience conflict as they cannot find enough time to allocate appropriately to the different work and home roles they play. Research investigating inter-role conflict, strain, and spillover interpret time as a limited resource which points to subjective construals of time. Alternative constructions of roles illuminate intersubjective construals of time.

While Kirby et al. (2003) find the psychological approach to understanding role conflict, strain, and spillover interesting and informative,

they question the usefulness in understanding the meanings people assign to their roles. From a discourse-centered approach, they suggest using integrated identity as a framework for understanding "processes (of identity construction and maintenance) rather than outcomes (such as avoiding or minimizing conflict) showing what individuals are trying to accomplish is not merely the avoidance of conflict but the positive accomplishment of personhood" (p. 14). Identity, as a social construct, emerges through and within historical and material contexts. In his examination of identity construction, Gregory (2001) discovered that participants not only drew on dominant storylines, but also re-shaped them to fit their current situations. Recalling Hall (2005) and Jameson (2005), as organizational members construct meaning they may choose to identify, distort, negotiate, or resist the popular messages they consume. Few studies explore the ways culture helps to construct identities; however, two are discussed below.

Medved & Kirby (2005) and Papa, Singhal, Ghanekar, and Papa (2000) explore the relationship between cultural messages and identity construction. Specifically, Medved & Kirby (2005) analyzed how corporate discourse constructs identity for stay-at-home (SAH) mothers. They discovered self-help books and online support communities rely on corporate discourse to frame SAH mothers as professional, managers, productive, and irreplaceable. As such, this discourse may enable and constrain SAH mothers. On the one hand, the

discourse legitimizes their choice to stay at home. On the other hand, corporate mothering discourse marginalizes their roles as caregivers, domestic laborers, and women. Additionally, "corporate mothering discourse also functions to marginalize the mothering work and selves of many minority and low-income women" (p. 461). Papa et al. (2000) also presented contradictory finding in their study on organizing for social change. They discovered individuals felt empowered by the freedom to enact non-stereotypical gender identities; yet, individuals also felt disempowered by the pull of media and community members to perform more normative identities. These studies highlight the discursive nature of identity construction and implicitly address the question of how we should spend our time. Likewise, these studies also highlight gender and class differences in construals of time as well as the impact of culture on construals of time.

A temporal perspective on identity construction draws attention to the "social process of deriving meaning" (Ballard & Seibold, 2006, p. 322) and self-interpreting "within the context of interpersonal, organizational, and cultural discourses that relate to their conceptions of selfhood within the dual contexts of work and family" (Kirby et al., 2003, p. 16). These processes emerge over time and space, and are situated presently, based upon the past. Our identity involves how we assign meaning to who we are and what we do. Therefore, our construals of time and identity mutually inform each other such that our

interpretation of time (re)constitutes our meaning of selfhood. How our *selves* spend time depends upon our interpretation of time as scarce, urgent, present, or future. Moreover, these interpretations are influenced by discursive practices.

Micro, meso, and macro-level discourses shape and are shaped by our contruals of time. Some research explores the ways discourse shapes how we perceive we should be spending our time. Specifically, Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, and Shepherd (2005) argue that family members influence our perceptions of what it means to participate in paid labor and family commitments. By analyzing 1,541 work, family, and balance messages, Medved and colleagues suggest family members play an integral role in the co-construction of work-life messages. Framed as a form of anticipatory vocational socialization, these family messages influenced how participants perceived they should spend their family and working time. Micro-level familial interactions shaped their construals of time. Messages positioned the individual as responsible for finding meaningful work and balance between personal and professional commitments. In an additional empirical study, Medved (2004) investigated micro-level practices of everyday events in order to explore the ways women navigate through their daily routines. Interestingly, she discovered that participants equated "doing work and family… as doing relationships" (p. 140). Everyday discursive practices influence the meanings we assign to our performances and construals of time. Even our most mundane interactions

shape our perceptions of how we spend time. Similarly, Kirby & Krone (2002) also investigated micro-level discursive practices. They found that both macro, or societal, level structures, such as cultural messages, and micro-level structures, such as co-worker interactions, impacted the construction of work-family benefits. Moreover, they argued that these practices facilitated and hindered employee use of "work-family" initiatives. Cultural, organizational, and personal messages simultaneously reinforced organizational policies while undermining their use. Conceptions of time exist within the enabling and constraining forces created by the micro, meso, and macro-level discourses regarding work and home life.

Despite the lack of direct attention paid to issues of time within some of the "work-life" literature, studies inquiring into boundaries, roles, identity, technology, and policy implementation inevitably address construals of time. Perceiving of time as scarce, urgent, present, or future shapes how we move and assign meaning within and across work and home domains. Likewise, how we interpret time shapes how we think we should spend it. Similar to enactments of time, construals of time vary along gender and class lines. Additionally, cultural messages play a key role in influencing construals of time.

A temporal perspective highlights the impact cultural practices have on enactments and construals of time. While most of the research explored within this dissertation cite culture as a mediator of our interpretations of time, only two

studies, (Medved & Kirby, 2005) and (Kirby & Krone, 2002), attempt to explore the impact popular messages have on our enactments and construals of time. A temporal perspective placed upon current "work-life" literature illustrates the recursive relationship between messages, thoughts, and actions. More research is needed in order to understand the ways popular messages shape experiences of time in order to advance understanding of work behaviors. Since much of the emphasis of popular discourse rests on sensemaking and the construction of meaning, researchers should study how individuals make sense of popular messages and how these messages enable and constrain consumers' incorporations, distortions, resistances, or negotiations of identities (Hall 2005; Jameson, 2005).

Organizational members offer a useful perspective as consumers and user of popular culture. Flores (2005) suggests: "As for thinking popular culture and developing a concept of the popular, the main correlation has to do with the 'catching,' the interplay between practice and theory, the 'people' as subject and as object of knowledge, between lived social reality and the observer" (p. 74-75). Using ethnomethodological interviewing techniques, researchers may "catch" not only the styles and languages of the community under investigation, but also their sensemaking (Weick, 1995) efforts. By observing, interacting, and questioning consumers about their choices, consumption, expectations, styles, and identity, researcher move closer to capturing understandings of the social

relationships between commodities, popular messages, identities, and actions. I have developed a number of research questions to help in this research.

RQ 1: How do organizational members make sense of and use popular artifacts?
RQ 2a: What are generational differences among popular socializing messages?
RQ 2b: What are generational differences among uses of popular messages?
RQ 3: What gender differences exist in the WL narratives on how popular messages functions in relation to construals and enactments of time?
RQ 4: What socioeconomic differences exist in the WL narratives on how popular messages function in relation to construals and enactments of time?

Answering these questions involved analyzing interview responses from 67 participants. Analysis of personal report narratives revealed three prominent themes emerged. The remaining four chapters within this dissertation not only explore methodological underpinnings guiding this investigation, but also explore each of the three themes fully. The following discussion offers a brief preview of the chapters to come.

Chapter Two. Organizational members make sense of their lived experiences through stories (Browning & Boudes, 2005; Rhodes & Brown, 2005). Stories provide members with an opportunity to retrospectively connect and organize the events in their lives leading to greater understanding and sensemaking. This current investigation seeks to explore the stories of

organizational members' perceptions of the influences of popular messages on their experiences of work-life time. As a sensemaking device, narratives operate as both a theoretical base and methodological tool for understanding personal experiences. Chapter two within this dissertation elaborates on each of these points highlighting not only the theories supporting narrative methodology, but also the specific details of data collection for this dissertation project. Sixty-seven participants across genders, age ranges, and socioeconomic backgrounds provided 268 single-spaced pages of text to analyze. Chapter two details the research process, concludes with a discussion of data collection, and leads into the analysis portion of the dissertation with chapter three. With the emergence of three prominent themes, chapters three, four, and five address each theme individually.

Chapter Three. Issues of balance and balancing time emerged from all interview transcripts; thus, chapter three addresses the similarities and differences expressed within interviews in "Balancing Time." Interview participants expressed the desire to have a balance between their paid and unpaid working time; between their personal and work time. However, not all participants express achieving balance in the same way. Chapter three explores socioeconomic differences in the ways participants conceive controlling time and using technology to enable or constrain work-life balance. For instance, low-socioeconomic interview participants believe they control time as opposed to the

organization, a thought shared by mid-to-high socioeconomic interviewees. As such, low socioeconomic interviewees reported "taking time" while mid-to-high socioeconomic participants claimed to protect time from the organization. Likewise, in order to protect time, many mid-to-high socioeconomic interview participants suggested using communication technologies. In fact, for many, these technologies enable them to not only protect their time, but also to balance time more effectively. Finally, in addition to socioeconomic differences, chapter three also addresses gender differences in construals of work-time time with reference to personal and work spatial boundaries. For the majority of men, work and personal time remain segmented despite the use of technologies blurring the lines between the two realms. In contrast, for the women in the study, communication technologies integrate their work and personal time enabling more balance. Chapter three concludes by discussing the socioeconomic and gender implications of these varying perspectives. Implications suggest "work-life balance" as a construct stems from a position of economic privilege, and that gender differences in construals of time may lead to discontent, ideas explored in chapter four.

Chapter Four. This dissertation began with the premise that popular messages influence expectations of working life. Chapter four explores interview perceptions by discussing unmet expectations, influences of expectations, and coping strategies participants use to manage their discontent between their

imagined self and real self. All participants reported experiencing a discrepancy between their expectations of work-life and their lived reality. For some, this discrepancy invoked humor, and others felt compelled to live out their expectations on a smaller scale. For mid-to-high socioeconomic participants, the recognition of this discrepancy induced feelings of anger, shame, and guilt. In fact, most of the women within this category expressed emotionality while discussing their lived experiences. Chapter four explores the roots of these frustrations as well as the coping strategies to reveal socioeconomic and gender implications. Mid-to-high socioeconomic females perpetuate a cycle by consuming popular messages, shaping their expectations and identities, feeling unfulfilled by the expectations set, and search out additional popular messages as a means to cope with their frustrations and guilt. Moreover, chapter four investigates notions of parental guilt and asserts feelings of guilt stem from a position of privilege and power. Mid-to-high socioeconomic participants have the opportunity and can financially afford to consider multiple identities. Chapter four sheds light on socioeconomic and gender implications of research findings, and chapter five delves deeper into issues of gender in not only the findings but also the research process as well.

Chapter Five. The final data analysis chapter in this dissertation turns the analytical gaze on the research process itself. It explores the role gender plays in the access, collection, and writing of research. Perhaps, the data investigated

within this study can be better understood by questioning the role the researcher's physical space, physical body, own subjectivity, and timing played in co-constructing the narratives shared during interviews. Researcher fieldnotes offer a unique perspective on the importance of power and gender while collecting interview data. Understanding participant responses through a gendered lens may highlight the potential unconscious-nature of popular messaging and the role of power in shaping responses. Participants' lack of ability to recall particular instances may be less because they truly cannot recall details and more because they want to appear more desirable and in control of their lives. This chapter further complicates the impact of gender and socioeconomics within this current study. The final pages of text within this dissertation push the discussion further by drawing out socio-political and gendered implications.

Chapter Six. Concluding the dissertation, chapter six attempts to draw specific connections between conclusions made in chapters three, four, and five and experiences of working individuals. Specifically, chapter six highlights perceptions of work and personal boundaries despite complete blurring of lines. Likewise, chapter six also interrogates notions of "work-life balance" questioning our construction of this term. Finally, this chapter discusses the identity crises discussed in chapter four to further address frustrations and discontent of a life un-lived. In the end, this chapter and dissertation provide organizational

members a way to make sense of their every day experiences managing their work and life time.

Chapter Two

Story-Time:
A narrative approach to understanding enactments and construals of time

"Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence."
Ricoer (1984, p. 52)

Viewing time as a subjective phenomenon, qualitative research provides understanding of different perceptions in a rich and detailed manner. As a way of understanding "meaning from the participant's point of view," qualitative research methods offer an opportunity to move inductively from specific, individual, lived experiences in order to draw more general conclusions (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 297). More specifically, this dissertation uses narrative research in order to answer the research questions. Within this line of research, narratives act as a theoretical base, methodological approach, and as a form of data by collecting and analyzing narratives from working individuals. Because stories represent a primary way people make sense of their experiences, a narrative approach is well suited to understanding sensemaking and time (Browning & Boudes, 2005; Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Cunliffe, et al., 2004; Czarniawska, 1998; Riessman, 1993). This chapter elaborates upon the theoretical and methodological assumptions framing this research. Additionally, the chapter discusses data collection, participants, data analysis,

my role as the researcher, and offer exemplars to illustrate potential outcomes of research data.

Once Upon a Time: Narrative as a Theoretical Base

Theoretical justifications for narrative research emerge from a variety of disciplines; although, the roots stem from Aristotle (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2000). Despite the historical and interdisciplinary nature of narrative research, many scholars agree upon the significance of narratives and narration to social life. Narratives exist as a primary sensemaking tool (Browning & Boudes, 2005; Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Cunliffe, et al., 2004; Tversky, 2004; Czarniawska, 1998; Riessman, 1993; Bruner, 1990; Ricoeur, 1984; Weick, 1995; MacIntyre, 1981). Tversky (2004) states, "Narrative construction begins with making sense of the world, organizing the space in which we exist, comprehending the events that unfold around us" (p. 390). Through narratives, we make sense of the world, assign meaning to events, and construct reality.

The concept of sensemaking refers to Weick's all encompassing term that defines the social, retrospective process of creating order and understanding events (Weick, 1995; Browning & Boudes, 2005). Since the time of Aristotle, narratives have been connected with sensemaking and organizing even though sensemaking as a term had not yet been coined. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle (1927) presents his theory of emplotment and argues in order to make sense of our experiences; we must organize our behaviors around plots and themes.

MacIntyre (1981), Ricoeur (1984), Cooper (1990) and Weick (1995) extend Aristotle's work by exploring the significance of structure to sensemaking. Without the structure of a narrative, "we would be confronted not only with uninterpreted, but an uninterpretable world" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 79). For Ricoeur (1984), emplotment entails the "active sense of organizing actions and events in a system" (p. 33). Further, Czarniawska (1998) summarizes Weick by suggesting, "Sensemaking consists of attempts to integrate a new event into a plot, by which it becomes understandable in relation to the context of what has happened" (p. 5). Narrative form allows us to understand the events around us by providing structure to the events. As we narrate events around a plot, we make sense of our lived experiences as they unfold dynamically through time not as static states (Czarniawska, 1998; Cunliffe, et al., 2004; Rhodes & Brown, 2005). Further, as we perceive actions and events to unfold sequentially through time, we construct meaning out of our experiences (Ricoeur, 1984; Weick, 1995; Bruner, 1990).

Narratives entail temporal sequencing that allows us to arrange events in a meaningful way (Weick, 1995; Browning, 1992; Polkinghorne, 1988). By organizing a series of actions or events into a temporal pattern and coherent story, people understand the events in their lives and create order where there might have otherwise existed chaos. "Storytelling has been considered as a way that people reflexively make sense of organizations and organizational life and

infuse their working lives with meaning" (Rhodes & Brown, 2005, p. 171). As people tell stories, their lived experiences become understood and communicated. Meaning, for both speaker and listener, unfolds with the telling of the story. The strength of the story depends not upon facts or truths, but rather on the coherence of the sequence (Bruner, 1990). Through language and discursive actions, storytellers and listeners create subjective and inter-subjective accounts of lived experiences to form local knowledge and a way of knowing (Czarniawska, 1998; Browning, 1992; Weick & Browning, 1986; Fisher, 1984; Ricoeur, 1984). Thus, as a form of discourse, narratives construct reality (Cooren, 1999).

Foucault (1980b) suggests "we must conceive of discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable" (p. 100). Moreover, meaning is created through the interaction and interplay of fragments. Foucault (1972) does not base the unity of a discourse upon the existence of objects, but rather to "the social practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (p. 49). Thus, discourses and discursive practices are social practices and constitutive of their objects.

Since discourses constitute objects, individuals, bodies, and experiences of which they speak, they actively construct versions of the world. Hence, language and discourse shapes reality. For Foucault (1967), language aids in the "formulation of truth and morality" (p. 183). Discursive practices constitute a

field of knowledge legitimizing certain practices, authorities and institutions which themselves compose truths about reality. These truths are not viewed in the absolute sense but rather as historical productions so that "the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, for fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders and manufactures something that did not as yet exist" (Foucault, 1980a, p. 193). As a discursive practice, storytelling allows us to understand and experience a reality that did not exist prior to the telling of the story. Likewise, storytelling may elicit multiple narratives and realities simultaneously (Boje, Luhman, & Baack, 1999) where no one narrative is more accurate or correct than another.

Narratives provide people with a sense of knowing and understanding. As a means of making sense of potential instabilities and complexities around us (Cooper, 1990), stories provide temporal order and knowledge about our subjective world. Moreover, as a tool for sensemaking and reality construction, stories help reduce ambiguities inherent in organizational life (Brown & Kreps, 1993) and are crucial to the practice of organizing (Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Brown, 2006; Czarniawska, 1998; Hatch, 1996; Weick, 1995; Bruner, 1991). As such, the epistemology underpinning narrative methodological approaches to organizational communication research position researchers to discover the variety of realities, experiences, and subjectivities inherent in organizational and organizing practices.

A Question of Time: Narrative as a Methodological Approach

Narrative methodology makes sense for organizational communication researchers seeking to understand the subjective, lived experiences of working individuals. As Rhodes and Brown (2005) suggest,

> If we who study organizations are to take the lives of others seriously and sympathetically- as a means to understand rather than control, to accept ambiguity rather than demand certainty, and to engage with the lived experience rather than abstract from it- then the turn to narrative needs to be continued (p. 182).

Narrative approaches are a perfect fit for discovering how people make sense of popular messages and how artifacts shape perceptions of time. In order to develop this argument further, I must shed light on the role communication plays in generating knowledge and the role of the organizational communication researcher in acquiring such knowledge. I will also link communication and organizational communication research to narrative and temporality to offer further justification.

Building upon the social constructionist perspective alluded to in the above theoretical discussion, narrative, as a methodological approach, assumes language shapes reality (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Searle, 1995; Berger & Luckmann, 1967). That is, the words we use shape and construct how we view our experiences and our world. Language shapes our thoughts which in turn

determine what we see and perceive (Thatchenkery, 2001). Moreover, language does not offer a literal, representation of reality, but a creative, symbolic rendition of our experiences. As a symbolic form, narrative provides structure, sequencing, and meaning in the construction of reality (Weick & Browning, 1986). As Browning (1992) suggests, "Stories are the reporting of experiences in everyday conversations" (p. 285). As such, reporting experiences in narrative form provides a way of understanding and knowing our experiences. Narrative, then, operates as *a* way of knowing. Extreme viewpoints of the social constructionist perspective argue *all* reality is socially constructed and narrative operates as *the* way of knowing (Alvesson & Skolberg, 2000). However, I take a more moderate view arguing narrative operates as a crucial way of knowing in the construction of social reality (see Searle, 1995). Narrative knowledge stems from the assertion that "we make sense of our experiences through integrated and sequenced accounts or stories, and that the researcher can study and interpret those stories as means of understanding organizational processes and events" (Cunliffe, et al., 2004). From this viewpoint, narrative and temporality connect to organizational communication research.

For organizational communication researchers, organizations can be viewed as socially constructed systems (Thatchenkery, 1992) and narratives as the substance of organizing (Brown, 2006; Bruner, 1991). "Thus, narratives are means through which organizations are brought to life in the different ways that

people can construct meaning and identity from organizational events and experiences" (Rhodes & Brown, 2005, p. 178). Using narrative methodologies, researchers uncover how organizational members construct their lives. The focus of study moves away from studying the organization as an object or container to exploring how researchers and organizational stakeholders subjectively and inter-subjectively co-construct reality of organizational life. Researchers place subjective experience as the focus of research (Gabriel, 1998) and become sensitive to the multiple interpretations of events and actions (Boje, 1995) as well as the researchers' role in the co-construction of narratives (Cunliffe, et al., 2004). Researchers actively engage with participants as they construct their stories providing researchers with an embodied form of research. The goal of such research is to understand multiple, interrelated narrative interpretations (Boje, 1995; Weick, 1995) in order to illuminate alternative interpretations and ways of seeing or being. Much like ethnography, the goal is to "grasp the native's point of view" (Schwartzman, 1993, p. 1). Ethnographic interviewing "provides researchers with a way to examine cultural knowledge, behavior, and artifacts that participants share and use to interpret their experiences" (p. 4). From this perspective, the researcher recognizes the micro-interactional and macro-cultural level forces co-constructing the narratives and perspectives of interview participants (Gamst, 1980). During the interview process, interviewees and researchers work together co-constructing and making

sense of the interviewees' lived experiences. Likewise, the researcher acknowledges the social construction and societal influences also permeating and shaping the interviewees' narratives. Through the ethnographic interaction, narratives, representing socially constructed realities, emerge for the researcher to unpack and discover the multiple voices within each story (Schwartzman, 1993).

In the discovery, researchers assign meaning to the narratives. Discovering the multiplicity of voices and stories "enables the localities of practice to be examined in terms of their complexities, contradictions, and multivocity" (Rhodes and Brown, 2005, p. 179). This type of research does not develop certainty or Truth claims about organizational life; however, narrative research does provide the researcher with a different, valuable understanding and embodied insight into lived experiences. Recognizing the collective construction of narratives contributes to the view of organizations as active and dynamic structures and draws attention to the reflexive nature of research (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Likewise, emphasizing narratives locates temporality as a central organizing concept (Boje, 2001).

Arguing time is inherent to human interaction, Ballard and Seibold (2004) posit, "Social constructions of time exist intersubjectively through persons' coordination and interaction with others, as well as their shared use of symbolic representations of temporality" (p. 3). Time is a communicative construct as

social patterns give rise to our conceptions of time (Dubinskas, 1988; Bourdieu, 1977). We conceptualize time based on our interactions with others. Likewise, time is best understood through narrative form (Cunliffe, et al., 2004). For Ricoeur (1984) "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (p. 52). Viewing time as a communicative construct, narrative as the means of understanding human experiences of time, and organizations as narrative constructions (Bruner, 1991), provides justification for narrative methodologies in the discovery of how popular messages shape organizational members' experiences of time. Like a jig-saw puzzle, these pieces just fit.

Narratives offer researchers local knowledge "that enables them to engage in the lived realities of organizational life (Rodes & Brown, 2005, p. 182). Understanding narrative as a mode of sensemaking provides a theoretical basis for justifying my research, and viewing narrative research as a form of knowledge acquisition positions narrative methodologies as a natural fit for the topic. Quoting Horning, Ballard and Seibold (2005) conclude their typology of work process activity cycles with a call, "Time is neither an abstract entity nor is it a neutral medium, but a result of human engagement with the world. We cannot understand time by looking at it alone but rather by analyzing the ways people are involved in everyday life" (p. 17). Horning's quote is a call for

narrative approaches to researching subjective experiences of time. Narrative approaches allow researchers to engage with participants in the co-construction of meaning. Additionally, analyzing stories enables researchers to examine how people experience time in their everyday lives.

Ain't It Time: Narratives as Data

As a form of data, narratives provide the researcher with an insight into the symbolic construction of organizational life (Gabriel, 1998). The researcher seeks to discover the stories people tell. As discourse, narratives are representations of past events recounted chronologically, or thematically responding to the question, "and then what happened?" (Riessman, 1993, p. 17). Narratives usually share common properties (Labov, 1972; Riessman, 1993) such as sequencing (Riessman, 1993), structure (Langellier, 1989; Gee, 1986; Labov, 1972; Burke, 1945), interpretive cues (Riessman, 1993; Toolan, 1988) and truths (Czarniawska, 1998; Browning, 1992; Weick & Browning, 1986; Fisher, 1984; Ricoeur, 1984). Once stories are collected, narrative communication researchers investigate the content, form, or telling of stories (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). The following section discusses both data collection and analysis and offers a number of examples of past narrative research aligning with Riessman's (1993) call for tacit knowledge (p. 26).

Data Collection

Gathering of data marks the first step toward discovery (Weller & Romney, 1988). For this dissertation investigation, I seek to understand how people make sense of their lives and chose interviews assuming they would produce the most fruitful and rich data. More specifically, I employed ethnographic, narrative interviews using a semi-structured protocol to elicit personal narratives about participants' experiences of time to answer my research questions. As previously discussed, people make sense of their lives through stories (Fisher, 1984). By collecting stories, I began to understand how people make sense of messages. Using ethnographic, narrative interviews was quite similar to other forms of qualitative interviewing in structure. As an ethnographic interviewer, I recognized my role in co-constructing narratives, and I explicitly told participants to share personal stories during the interviews.

Narrative Interviews. Narrative interviews represent one of many types of qualitative interviewing. According to Baxter and Babbie (2004), "Narrative interviews differ from traditional in-depth interviews in their focus on a particular communicative form- the story or narrative. Otherwise, they are indistinguishable from each other" (p. 343). Qualitative interviewing is characterized as a form of face to face, interactive, and interpretive inquiry in which the researcher provides a general guide for the conversation (Baxter &

Babbie, 2004); yet, the researcher and participants collaborate and construct meaning together (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Alasuutari, 1995).

Some scholars define the study of stories and narratives as biographical studies (Creswell, 1998; Atkinson, 1998; Denzin, 1989). These studies entail a variety of data forms such as life-histories, oral-histories, autobiographies, self stories, and personal experience narratives. Denzin (1989) distinguishes between these various forms in his work. Crucial to my investigation, Denzin articulates the differences between self stories and personal experience narratives. Whereas self stories are usually told to groups, position the teller as the center of the story, and often involve a pivotal life experience, personal experience narratives often focus on more common and mundane experiences (p. 44). For example, a recovering alcoholic's speech at an AA meeting would represent a self story, and a traditional interview where the interviewer asked the interviewee to tell a story about a particular event in his or her life would resemble a personal experience narrative. Despite their differences, these two forms still grow out of personal experience. Since my main objective was to encourage participants to share personal experience narratives during interviews, I did not limit participants in their storytelling. In some cases, the narratives told entailed self story characteristics. Some participants could recall specific, pivotal experiences that illustrate how popular messages shaped their enactments and construals of time; however, most of my participants talked

about more common, everyday experiences. Regardless, both provided a wealth of information to analyze.

With narrative interviews, how the narrative is co-constructed between researcher and narrator matters in addition to what stories the narrator tells (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Through open-ended, semi-structured interviews, researchers may still remain focused on the particular content under investigation, but have the flexibility to probe and explore other unexpected areas that may arise during the conversation. Rubin and Rubin (1995) claim:

> Design in qualitative interviewing is iterative. That means that each time you repeat the basic process of gathering information, analyzing it, winnowing it, and testing it, you come closer to a clear and convincing model of the phenomenon you are studying…The continuous nature of qualitative interviewing means that the questioning is redesigned throughout the project (p. 46, 47).

With a flexible protocol and schedule, researchers may decide to delve into a particular area in order to gain a richer understanding. Further, by actively engaging participants during the interview experience, researchers can provide a "narrative course" by "asking respondents to interrogate their own experiences in particular ways and pointing respondents in fruitful interpretive directions" (p. 50-51). Researchers and participants together create a life story that is situated within the interactional context of the interview. This interactional

component points to the crucial role the interviewer plays as an ethnographer as well.

Ethnographic Interviews. The goal of ethnographic interviewing is much like narrative interviewing in that researchers aim to elicit participants' own understanding and meaning rather than inserting meaning. Anthropologist Helen Schwartzman (1993) argues, "The ethnographic interviewer should avoid translating what an informant says into the researcher's own theories or terms, or telling the informant what he or she is feeling or experiencing, or interrupting an informant during his or her response to a question" (p. 44). Ethnographic interviewers ask open-ended questions allowing participants to express their own interpretation of events. The interviewer probes for descriptive accounts and encourages interviewees to expand on their personal experiences with specific examples (Schwartzman, 1993; Werner & Schoepfle, 1987). Through the probes not only is the researcher able to elicit personal accounts, cases, or stories (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987), but the researcher is also influencing the construction of the story with the open probes. Interviewees become able to imagine, explore, and think about their experiences of which they may have otherwise ignored. Employing a flexible interview protocol provides the researcher with an opportunity to probe in directions deemed significant and meaningful during the interview process.

Flexibility in structure allows for the variability of meaning. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) suggest, "A fixed-choice interview format would render such narrative complexities invisible…Narrative complexity requires an interview format that accommodates contextual shifts and reflexivity" (p. 55). With an active, semi-structured interview plan, I discovered the complexities and multiple subjectivities and interpretations within the stories of my participants.

A scheduled but flexible (Lindlof, 1995) eight-question, multi-tiered interview guide (see Appendix A-C) structured the interviews. Interview participants were informed of the work-life and narrative aspects of the study; however, they were not informed of the popular message component. My hope is that popular discourse emerges in the data. In the case that it does not, I intend to probe for artifact uses and consumption. The following paragraph provides a discussion and rationale for this choice of deception.

When crafting an interview protocol, researchers have a choice of whether to divulge the content of their research with participants. Although purposefully deceiving research participants might raise ethical questions, sometimes researchers need to conceal their main objectives in order to avoid biasing respondents (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). A number of researchers employing narrative methods choose to conceal their research agendas. For example, in her research on survival stories, Norton (1989) asked participants to talk about their lives. She assumed they would organize their experiences in

narrative form; however, rather than ask for narratives, she hoped narratives would emerge in the data. Likewise, when Meyer (1997) studied the role of humor in groups and organizations, he asked participants to talk about work. Similar to Norton, Meyer assumed organizational members would find commonality through stories, particularly humorous stories. Additionally, Overlien and Hyden (2003) also concealed their specific research interest; although, they did guide participants through a process of "free narrative" in which participants "would feel free and have the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and feelings (p. 225). In order to discover how narratives construct the work identity of staff members at a detention home, Overlien and Hyden asked staff members to talk about their conversations the young victims of sexual abuse present at the center instead of asking staff members to tell stories. In all three above examples, scholars hid their desires to collect narratives from their participants. Instead of stating their intentions, they prompt interviewees with questions or statements aimed at eliciting a narrative as a response. This deception was crucial to the advancement of their arguments that narratives operate as a mode of sensemaking.

Other scholars take a different approach asking participants to tell stories. For instance, Wood's (2001) interview study of women in abusive relationships and Kellas's (2005) investigation into the construction of family identity both explicitly ask and encourage research participants to tell stories. Both authors

wanted interviewees to make sense of their experiences in narrative form. The choice to disclose research intentions depends upon the degree to which the shared information biases or influences the response of research participants. Neither choice is better than the other. In line with Holstein and Gubrium (1995), the active interviewer should garner the desired content by focusing on two goals "to gather information about *what* the research project is about and to explicate *how* knowledge concerning the topic is narratively constructed" (p. 56, original emphasis).Deciding on full disclosure of research depends upon how the disclosure would affect these two goals.

For my dissertation research, I disclosed some elements of my research agenda but not all. As with Woods (2001) and Kellas (2005), I asked participants to tell stories about their lives. Specifically, I wanted to understand how people construct their work-life stories. However, I did not share my interests in time or popular messages. My hope was that, as participants tell their stories, they would not only illuminate their experiences of time, but also the popular artifacts which shape such experiences would emerge. When the influences of popular messages did not begin to emerge in the interviews, I probed, directed, and guided the conversation in order to explore possible influencing factors. This was done by asking questions about how participants felt about their story, their expectations of "work" and "life," and what shaped these expectations. By asking these questions, I engaged with the interviewee in constructing meaning

of his or her life events. This allowed me to guide the interview such that I discovered the content under investigation and recognized my role in the co-construction of narratives. Further, I recorded both the content (what) and process of construction (how) providing me with "data about the subject matter of the research and data about how that subject matter is organized in respondents' narrative experience" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Interview Participants. I interviewed 67 working individuals for this study. Participants lived in three geographic areas: Central Texas, Tennessee, and Louisiana. In order to answer research questions described previously, participants varied according to gender, socioeconomic status, and age. In terms of gender, 33 of the interviews offer a male perspectives and 34 of the interviews provide female experiences. Likewise, 20 of the participants come from a low socioeconomic status and 27 from a mid-to-high socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status was based upon national and regional economic statistics indicating low-income line. Hourly wages (< $10.00/hour), parental status, and marital status also influenced the low socioeconomic label. Additionally, interview participants fall into one of three age categories: *prospective*, *perspective*, and *retrospective*.

Prospective Participants. These participants are characterized as young (n<21) working individuals currently in the planning stages of their careers. *Prospective* interviewees spend time thinking about and planning their future

careers and lives, imagining what organizational and personal life will look like. College students comprised this category, and I interviewed 20 within this bracket.

Perspective Participants. These participants are also young (30<n<48) working individuals; however, these interviewees are at the career and home building stage. They are not yet firmly established in their careers, are attempting to build a desired home-life, and may have young children living at home. These are the participants *in the mix* of the work-life struggle. I interviewed 27 participants within this age group.

Retrospective Participants. These participants are characterized as older (n>54) working individuals at a more settled stage in their personal and professional lives. While they still struggle with work-life issues, these participants are at a unique stage able to compare work-life then and now. These interviewees have built their work and home lives, (of those with children) have children living outside the home, and might think about retirement more often than continual career advancement. Twenty interview participants came from the *retrospective* generational perspective.

Participant Recruitment. I took a multi-pronged approach to recruiting these participants. First, I sought out college students as a way of problematizing issues related to *prospective* organizational members. These college students came from 3 different local universities in the Central Texas

area. Next, I contacted organizational contacts/gatekeepers to inquire about interest from *perspective* and *retrospective* participants. Additionally, I used my personal associations with running clubs and online social networks to solicit participation. Finally, I contacted family and friends to locate participants meeting eligibility requirements.

Data Analysis

Working from the assumption that the goal of research is discovery, I employed grounded theory to analyze and interpret interview data and looked for sensitizing concepts (van den Hoonaard, 1997). Based on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory supports a method of data analysis which can be applied to a variety of large, disparate textual data sets (Browning, 1978) and encourages multiple meanings and interpretations within the data. By utilizing grounded theory for my narrative analysis, I gain freedom and flexibility to mine the data for unexpected discoveries. Likewise, using sensitizing concepts, I was able to guide my analysis by deriving meaning from the participants' perspective (van den Hoonaard, 1997).

In line with qualitative research methods, grounded theory moves from details and units of data to more general and abstract findings based on the data (Browning, Sitkin, Sutcliffe & Shetler, 1998; Browning, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Through constant-comparative analysis, researchers code and categorize data based on core themes or sensitizing constructs present within the data.

Upon delineating core themes or categories which account for the variety of instances within the data, the researcher must integrate the categories with previous research (Strauss, 1987). The end result is original interpretations (Glaser, 2002) grounded in literature (Strauss, 1987).

The value of this analysis lies in its ability to produce middle range theory (Rogers, 2003). On the one hand, because of the emphasis on literature and previous research, we can abstract upward to relate data to theory. On the other hand, because examples are specific enough to tell the "story" of our research, we can use the data in an applied way. We can look downward to provide empirical evidence to talk about the real world.

Additional value exists by emphasizing the role originality plays in constructing categorical themes. With narrative data, I chose to create categories based on the content of stories and the co-construction of stories. Grounded theory provides flexibility and originality in the development of categories as long as the amount of data reaches saturation. That is, as long as new incidents cannot account for additional categories. A variety of researchers have analyzed narrative data along the lines outline above (content, form, and telling or co-construction of stories). The following research exemplars help as I begin my discovery.

Exemplars. Most of the published narrative research explores the content of participants' stories. For example, Baxter and Pittman (2001) discovered how

romantic couples use storytelling and reminiscing about past "coupled" experiences to mark turning points in their relationships. Similarly, by analyzing stories told within organizations, Witten (1993) contends that narratives operate as a mode of persuasion maintaining workplace cultures of obedience. Likewise, the five examples discussed earlier (Kellas, 2005; Overlien & Hyden, 2003; Wood, 2001; Meyer, 1997; Norton 1989) all draw conclusions based upon the content of participants' stories. All of these researchers code their data according to the content of what participants say. Sensitizing concepts emerge from the themes inherent in the content of the stories shared.

An additional way to code and analyze narrative data is to focus on the structure or form of the narratives themselves. Coding for form recognizes the sequencing of events and plots as they unfold through the telling of stories. In her discussion of narrative analysis, Riessman (1993) offers two examples of narrative research emphasizing form. First, Ginsburg's (1989) investigation into pro-life and pro-choice women activists compares the plot-lines across the personal narratives of these women. Noting similarities and differences in the sequencing of events, she learns that the two groups of women construct their plots in very different ways. Through this analysis, Ginsburg "examines causal sequence to locate the turning points that signal a break between the ideal and real, the cultural script and the counternarrative" (Riessman, 1993, p. 30). Second, Riessman's (1990) own research on divorcing individuals seeks to

understand how these individuals make sense of marriage and themselves and how people expressed their emotional difficulties. Despite the apparent lack of narrative structure in the interview data, Riessman reduces the talk to resemble poetic form by parsing it according to lines, stanzas, and parts "examining its organizing metaphors and creating a schematic to display the structure" (Riessman, 1993, p. 50). By analyzing the poetic form, Riessamn found that men and women have different and distinctive vocabularies of emotion.

The final group of exemplars, and the least represented as published research, analyzes and codes data based on the telling of the story. Researchers code for their own involvement in the co-construction of the story (Cunliffe, et al., 2004). In her study of DES daughters, Bell (1988) recognizes her role as a co-creator of the narratives these women tell and highlights how meaning is produced through the interaction of speakers. By exploring language use of DES daughters, medical community, and researcher, Bell discovers the role multiple voices play in identity construction. Additionally, O'Connor (1997) also acknowledges her role in the telling and co-constructing of narratives particularly in the case of the read (rather than heard) narrative. Conceiving of organizational decision making as a construction of multiple, continuous narratives, O'Connor concludes, "Narratives offer a way to invent the future" (p. 413). By exploring narratives of the past, we (re)create a new actuality in the future. O'Connor's research along with other exemplars provides illustrations

for the variety of ways I began to analyze and unpack the stories interviewees tell about the time of their lives.

For this current investigation, I chose to analyze both the content of participants' messages and my role as an ethnographic interviewer in co-constructing meaning within the narratives. Consistent content themes emerged within the interview transcripts offering useful insight into answering research questions.

Data. Interviews were scheduled at 60-minute intervals; however, not all interviews lasted for that amount of time. One interview lasted 3 ½ hours, and a shorter interview only covered 33 minutes. All interviews summed to a total of 72 hours, but the average length of time was 64 minutes. Interviews were recorded (when organizations allowed) and transcribed into manuscript form resulting in 268, single spaced typed pages. Initial coding resulted in 56 themes present within the data set. After combining and condensing themes, seven categories emerged. Of these seven categories, three categories provided the most fruitful answers to research questions. The following chapters will develop these three themes by exploring the ways participants experience a life in balance, recognize unmet expectations, and co-construct narratives through the interview interaction.

Chapter Three

Balancing Time

"I keep work at work and home at home. That's how I have balance."
Chris, 37 year-old, working father of two children

"I love that I can work from home; I can be on a conference call and still fold laundry."
Gina, 34 year-old, working mother of three children

Regardless of age, gender, or socioeconomic class, many people seek to have a balance between their work and personal life. In fact, through 67 interviews, all but two interview participants reported the desire for balance. Moreover, the two lone participants questioning other people's desire for balance hypothesized balance my not be desired if someone does not have a pleasant home environment. Specifically, James, a 38 year-old custodial worker, explained, "I suppose people who don't like their husband or their wife, you know, if they don't like to be home, they might work more. Those people may not want balance."

Overwhelmingly, however, participants responded positively to the question, "Do you think work-life balance is desirable?" Many interviewees responded similarly with comments such as, "Of course!" and "Yeah, I think so." While most interview participants shared the same desire for balance, not all interviewees described the same road to achieving balance. Particularly, differences emerged in the enactments and construals of work-life balance. In particular, gender differences emerged in construals of time with regard to

boundaries, and socioeconomic differences became apparent while exploring issues of time control. Male participants discussed the necessity to segment their work and home lives while females sought to integrate their realms. Construing time as scarce and orienting to the future, participants became sensitive to their work and personal boundaries either compensating or perpetuating their lack of personal time. Although these differences emerged in the data, some similarities also existed. Most participants in this study conceive of time as a resource to be "taken." Moreover, a future orientation toward time encouraged participants to discuss guarding and protecting time in order to ensure more time later. Participants framed time as a scarce commodity; as something to "take" and protect, an idea addressed next.

Taking Time. When discussing concepts such as work-life balance and leisure time, many interviewees describe time as a scarce commodity to be taken, protected, and used before it is taken away. Interview participants discussed enactments of taking time as a way to achieve more balance and perceived adequacy in the amount of of work and personal time performed. Whereas, interview participants from higher socio-economic classifications frame the organization as the entity eager to take time away, lower socioeconomic interviewees, who had a conception of the "work-life balance" construct, viewed time as a commodity to be controlled. For these low socioeconomic participants, taking time involves taking it *because it is theirs*. Regardless of class, participants

construed time as scarce; thus, participants agreed, time must be "taken," controlled, and protected.

When asked to describe their ways to achieving balance, many participants claim to just "take time" for their personal life. For instance, Emily explained, "I just take time for my family. If I don't take it, I won't have it." Similarly, Michael suggested, "I generally schedule my day so that I can take the time I need with my family in the afternoons and evenings." Moreover, Meagan argued, "I take the time when I need it; if I need it for a sick child or a doctor visit or something. I just do the things I need to do. Work comes second. When I need personal time, I take it." For all of these participants, personal time is scarce time needing to be taken (and often protected) before it is lost, either taken by someone else or unavailable. Much like Hochschild's (1997) findings, interview participants conceive of time as an actual commodity needing to be taken, and interestingly, socioeconomic class impacts the conception of work-life balance and who controls this time.

Data analysis highlights socioeconomic implications in the conception of "work-life balance" as a construct. Work-life balance issues appear to address, permeate, and consume mid-to-high socioeconomic interviewees' interests and ideas opposed to low-socioeconomic interviewees. Only low socioeconomic interviewees who work for larger corporations had a conception of work-life balance. James cited hearing his previous employer using the term stating, "I

remember [Organization] would post signs and talk about work-life balance, but they didn't mean it. At least, they didn't mean it for us on the line." Similarly, Julie recalled, "People began talking about it 9 or 10 years ago, but nobody meant it." Also, Claudia, who works for a large, corporate chain organization, laughed when I asked her to define work-life balance. She stated, "Oh yeah, that's just for managers [laughter]." These interviewees have heard of the concept "work-life balance," but do not find a connection to it. The term does not resonate with their experiences or needs. Other low socioeconomic interview participants admitted to not hearing of the concept at all.

Some low socioeconomic interviewees struggled with defining the term "work-life balance." When I asked Christy to define work-life balance, she asked, "What do you mean by work-life balance?" Much like Christy, Jeremy also questioned the concept of work-like balance. When I asked for his definition of work-life balance, he replied, "What do you mean? I've never heard that word." I continued to probe Jeremy for his experiences of work and personal time and discovered he perceives he spends an adequate amount of time on his work and personal time. Jeremy added to my line of questioning by asking, "Why wouldn't I spend enough time here? I work here. I work, and then I go home. At home, I spend time with [son], I watch TV, we eat; I have a nice life. I love my job and my family." Despite not having a definition for work-life balance, Jeremy, along with other interviewees within this interview bracket, inherently

has an understanding of how to manage work and personal time. For these interviewees, their conception of balance may stem from their assumptions of who controls time. Moreover, probing all interviewees within this classification, I uncovered assumptions about the control of time, described more below.

Socioeconomic differences emerged within the data in reference to who controls time. Low-socioeconomic interview participants view their personal time as *their* time. That is, they are in control of their enactments of time; it is their time to take, schedule, separate, and pace. For instance, James clearly stated, "People are in control of work-life balance. If they want more time with their families and less time at work, they can change that." As a former employee of a large organization purporting to support work-life balance initiative, James recalled hearing about work-life balance conversations at work. He continued, "I remember hearing all those managers and executives talking about work-life balance, 'be sure to have work-life balance.' YOU make your work-life balance." Similarly, Christy explained, "I work at work, and take time with my family and friends when I'm not at work. My free time is my time. I do what I want when I am not at work." From this perspective, the worker controls work and personal time schedules and the performance of balance. While at work, these individuals give their time to the organization, but after work, they take their time back. In both cases, time represents a commodity they control, and they determine the best ways to enact their time. Both Christy and James separate their work and

personal time and schedule personal time accordingly. Other interview participants within this socioeconomic classification responded in similar ways.

Julie, a newly divorced mother of two, offered a similar construal of time. She stated, "I would love to do everything, but I can't. So, I prioritize and do what I can. Instead of choosing to stay up until 2 in the morning, I have learned to say, 'No.' Sometimes you feel selfish, but in the big scheme of things you do what you have to do." In addition, to affecting scheduling and separation of her time, Julie's construal of time also influences her pace. She changes her speed and scheduling in order to take the time for herself. As such, construals of time influence enactments of time. Viewing time as a scarce commodity, low-socioeconomic interviewees enact their scheduling, pace of work, and separation based on their perceived locus of control. Whereas, the low-socioeconomic participants view time to be taken in their control, mid-to-high socioeconomic interviewees view the control of time stems from outside of themselves.

Mid-to-high socioeconomic participants, both male and female, view the organization as the controller of time. These two groups view time as a commodity needing to be protected and taken before the organization takes it away. For George, he recalled stories of an organization unwilling to allow for personal time. In fact he stated, "I have balance when I take time for my personal life, and this was not always the case. Ten years ago, I remember thinking, 'Wow! How much more do I have to give here?' [Organization]

demanded so much of me and my time. Now I know I just have to take it; otherwise, they will take it from me." George's experience was shared by a number of other interviewees within this mid-to-high socioeconomic classification bracket. Michael stated, "I used to work 12-14 hour days, and now I know I have to take the time. [Organization] is not going to just give it to me. I have to take it." In a similar manner, Jeanne shared her experiences stating, "It has gotten better here. Before, you would feel guilty asking for personal time. Now, I just take time. [Organization] provides me with enough tools that if I need to finish working at home, after work or at night, I can." Gina's work-life story rings true with the above accounts as well. She argued, "I am lucky that [Organization] gives me the flexibility and use of technology to have work-life balance. I can stay connected 24/7! Even if not, any job I take would provide me work-life balance. I would force it." Likewise, Connie added, "I have balance 60-70% of the time, but sometimes I think that work wants more out of me than I ought to be giving." All of these accounts suggest the organization controls time, and as individuals seek more time for their personal lives, they must steal, take, and protect that time from the organization. Moreover, these perspectives on time represent a socially constructed reality based upon their own construals of time. Since these participants view time as scarce, they assume little personal time may exist in the future. Thus, their future oriented perspective informs their commodification of time and "work-life balance."

Interesting difference emerged with regard to issues of work-life balance concept construction and perceived control of time. Work-life balance appears to have socioeconomic connotations such that the discourse only applies to mid-to-high socioeconomic class. The significant implications of this inequality will be discussed further at the end of this chapter. Equally interesting, the use of technology becomes a vital tool toward achieving balance. For the twenty-seven mid-to-high socioeconomic interview participants, all cited technological communication tools as crucial to achieving work-life balance. Specifically, these tools affect participants' enactments of time.

Technology as a tool for achieving balance. Within the data, the expectations and uses of technology varied along social and generational lines. For *prospective* interview participants, balance can only be achieved through the use of technology. These interviewees expect to utilize technology in the workplace, if for no other reason than to have balance. Likewise, mid-to-high socioeconomic *perspective* and *retrospective* interviewees site the use of workplace technology as the means to having balance. Conversely, workplace technologies did not emerge within the low-socioeconomic data relating to work-life balance. Instead, communication technologies emerged as a part of work or recreation.

Analyzing data from low-socioeconomic interviewees highlights differences in technology use. Of the twenty interviewees, two did not discuss the use of communication technologies in their everyday activities (one

perspective male and one *retrospective* male). Their work does not require technological tools, and they reported not having a computer at home. Additionally, of the remaining eighteen low socioeconomic interviewees, all use computers at work and seven participants reported using computers outside of work time. Those interviewees who use the computer outside of work do so for entertainment purposes only. Meagan cited that she "lives for Facebook™", Catherine communicated a similar liking for online social networking with web sites such as Facebook™ and discussed her affinity for e-mailing friends, and both James and Scott admitted they enjoy "surfing the web." While James explores the internet to catch up on current events and learn about a potential career in air conditioning repair, Scott "surfs" for funny stories and pictures. For low-socioeconomic interviewees who use technological tools, technology represents either a required tool for work or a device of leisure outside of work. Not surprising, the use of technology for work purposes *outside* of work did not emerge in these twenty interviews. All twenty participants work hourly-paid positions making work off-hours undesirable and uneconomical. However, the remaining interview participants from the *prospective* as well as mid-to-high socioeconomic class brackets did construct stories recognizing the use of communication technologies in order to achieve balance. The connection between technology use and work-life balance varied along generational and socioeconomic lines.

While constructing work-life narratives for the future, *prospective* interviewees constructed a reality requiring the use of technology to achieving work-life balance. For instance, John described his ideal career as an entrepreneur, owning a business and managing from a distance. He told a very specific, detailed story,

> I don't want to work in a traditional setting or work traditional hours. I don't want to work hourly, and I don't want to sit in 30 minutes of traffic everyday. I want a job of my making: not structured by time, not governed by a dress code, and structured by my own convictions. Suits are sharp, but I don't know if I want to put one on everyday. I want to live on a boat, and travel, see the world, and manage my business while I'm traveling… As the owner, I could be "working" all the time, but I wouldn't have to be there. I could call in or e-mail from Panama for instance.

John has constructed a very detailed narrative of what he desires for his life, and this story demands the use of communication technologies in order for him to achieve this desired lifestyle. Additional *prospective* interviewees iterated the same need for communication technology tools to enable a future work-and-personal life in balance.

Much like John, Ava spoke of a career entailing, "flexible hours, maybe project-based, where I can create my own schedule and get work done when I feel creative and inspired." Similarly, Stephanie claimed to seek a career where "I have an alternative schedule, where I can schedule my work time around my clients; let their needs schedule my day." Sharon and Mark also commented on the desire and expectation for flexibility in their working schedules. Mark sought to "travel locally and abroad consulting other engineers," and Sharon aspired to have "a flexible working schedule to be able to work from home" when she needs to, while her husband works a traditional 9-5 work day. For all these students, the dream career or desired lifestyle would not be possible without the use of communication technologies. In order to manage or lead from a distance, work at non-traditional work-times in non-traditional work settings, and travel for work, people need to use communication technologies. Despite failing to overtly recognize the need for technology in fulfilling their work-life stories, the future of work for these students entails a career and life held in balance through the use of communication technologies. They assume work exists wherever they demand and need. While the specific realities and details for these students may seem fantastical, their expectations of flexibility and crucial reliance on technology do not differ from current lived experiences of mid-to-high socioeconomic working professionals described further below.

Almost all mid-to-high socioeconomic interview participants acknowledged the necessity of workplace communication technologies to achieving work-life balance. In fact, Johnny was the only interviewee who did not mention the use of technology as a tool for achieving work-life balance, but the nature of Johnny's current work does not require communication technology nor does it consume his time. Despite having an aerospace engineering background, Johnny now spends half of his time with his wife building their house and the half of his time providing maintenance and repair work for a small organization. Johnny works because he cannot imagine not working. In contrast to every other male participant in the study, Johnny does not work for money. Johnny works for the satisfaction earned at the end of a long day.

Even though Johnny's case offered an alternative perspective, the remaining twenty-six participants within this bracket ALL discussed workplace technologies as crucial and necessary for achieving work-life balance. Communication technologies enabled flexible working time, flexible scheduling, individual pace-setting, and perceptions of acceptable boundaries. As earlier research suggests (Kirby et al., 2003), organizational members perceive that work and home exist in separate spheres or realms and that people experience conflict based on the permeability of those boundaries (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2005; Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2005). For some, strict separation between home and work lead to less conflict. For others, a blurring of personal and work

boundaries reduces conflict. While perceptions of boundaries varied between genders, the enabling function of workplace technologies on participants' flexibility, scheduling, and pace emerged equally for both men and women.

Flexibility in scheduling and performing work tasks emerged as the most frequently cited benefit to using workplace technologies. For example, in telling her work-life story, Beatty framed technology as the most important means to having balance. Specifically, Beatty shared the following story of her day.

> I am very fortunate that I have a job that grants me flexibility. I generally work 6:30-7:30 at my house. Then I take my children to school. I usually arrive at work between 8:30-9:00 and work until 3:30. From work, I pick up my kids, we go to dance at 4:30 and soccer at 5:00, and I am home to cook dinner. The kids go to bed around 7:00 and I log back into work around 8:30. Then I work until 9:30. It's very balanced. I can work from home. I have the flexibility to manage my day.

Beatty uses workplace technologies to construct a schedule which fits her personal and work obligations. She sees the flexibility of working at home during specific times conducive to her schedule and crucial to having balance in her life. Similarly, Sean acknowledged he has flexibility in his schedule which enables him to have work-life balance. He stated,

> My balance is essentially working to solve problems at work, but when I am needed at home, I can be home. My story would be work hard at work to solve problems before they arise, and take care of home when needed. Having flexibility helps. I have flexibility in re-arranging my schedule if I need to or if I need to work from home.

Just like Beatty, Sean uses technology to work from home when his personal life demands his presence at home. Working from home provides him flexibility in scheduling and enacting work tasks. Sean and Beatty are not exceptions. Additional cases also exist. The stories of Jeanne, Michael, and Tim also discuss the role of technology enabling flexibility, individual pace-setting, and scheduling ease.

Jeanne, Michael, and Tim shared similar stories as Sean and Beatty. Jeanne offered, "My work-life story now is that I work in an environment that allows me to get my job done anywhere I want, at home or work. That's a kind of flexibility and trust that is very different than 20 years ago. I did not have this kind of flexibility when I was younger." Tim professed to using technology similarly and enjoying the benefits these tools bring to work-life balance. He stated, "I use tools to never let work interfere with what I need to do at home. I have good work-life balance because I use these tools when I need them like sending an e-mail from my daughter's volleyball game. I have the freedom and

flexibility to leave work early to attend the game, and if I need to finish work there, I can use my blackberry." Tim relies on his communication technology tools to enact tasks for his work and personal life. These technologies provide him flexibility in scheduling his work and personal time. Michael also specifically mentioned flexibility in his job as a means to balance. He admitted, "I am lucky to be in my position. I have a pretty flexible job. I work entirely from home, unless I have a meeting which is not very often. I schedule my day and make room for work, my hobby, and my family. I only have to account for eight hours of work each day, and since I am at home, I work during the hours that fit my specific schedule that day." For all of these working professionals, communication technologies provide them flexibility to work non-traditional hours, flexibility in scheduling their work and personal time, and flexibility in pace-setting. These perceptions invoke a number of problematic issues to be addressed at the end of this chapter. Nonetheless, because of the perceptions of communication technologies, participants' work at their own pace attending to work demands while at remote, non-work, spaces.

In all, just as earlier research suggests, communication technologies provide mid-to-high socioeconomic employees' perceived freedom, flexibility, and perceived control leading to positive outcomes (Golden, Viega & Simsek, 2006; Perrons, 2003; Greenblatt, 2002). Because of their ability to schedule their own time, these interviewees enjoy the sense of balance technology provides. As

previously seen, this perception of "balance" also exists within the student population. Students imagining and preparing for future careers, set their expectations based upon assumptions work will allow and offer flexibility and control; yet, the *prospective* stories failed to address harsh economic conditions. Rather, *prospective* stories illustrated lucrative careers. Workplace technology use connects with socioeconomic class such that flexibility exists with some jobs but not with others. Flexibility in job scheduling and pace stems from privileged positions. Mid-to-high socioeconomic employees have the opportunities to re-arrange work schedules, times of work, and pace. However, since mid-to-high employees view the organization as the controller of time, technology accounts for and makes up for that lack of control. Technology use provides mid-to-high socioeconomic employees perceived control by allowing for individualized pace, flexibility, and scheduling, all ideas addressed at the end of this chapter.

As discovered, technology provides a means for mid-to-high socioeconomic employees to balance their work and personal lives. These mid-to-high socioeconomic organizational members seek additional strategies to enhance their work-life balance. Here, gender differences emerge in the way technology either integrates or segments enactments of time. Specifically, male participants perceive technology provides them a tool for segmenting or separating their enactments of time. Conversely, female participants use technology to integrate or merge their working and personal time. For both male

and female mid-to-high socioeconomic participants, using technology in this way provides them with perceived control over their scarce time. Because low-socioeconomic interview participants already perceive to have control of their time, additional strategies for work-life balance management become unnecessary. Low-socioeconomic employees segment their enactments of time much like male mid-to-high socioeconomic interview participants. Thus, clear gender differences emerged between males and females within the mid-to-high socioeconomic group. Whereas males in the mid-to-high grouping see segmentation as a means to achieving balance, women within this bracket view integration as crucial to achieving balance. Moreover, communication technologies become the necessary tools for mid-to-high socioeconomic integration or segmentation.

Integration-Segmentation. As discussed earlier, communication technologies blur traditional boundaries and create a dialectical interpretation of time. Working time becomes seen as either integrated or segmented with personal time (Kirby et al., 2003; English-Lueck, 2002; Broadfoot, 2001). This spectrum refers to the level of connectedness between work and home. One the one hand, integration involves having no distinction between work and home life. On the other hand, segmentation indicates work and home exist as separate realms. Although research challenges traditional notions of boundaries, or imaginary lines marking the different spheres of work life and personal life,

suggesting organizational members always engage in some amount of work at home and life exists at work (Kirby, et al., 2003). However, experiences of interview participants attest to a different interpretation. Men within the mid-to-high socioeconomic class use technology to segment time. For these interview participants, communication technologies create the perception of separate work and personal time spaces. These men value workplace technologies' ability to separate work and personal time. Conversely, females within the mid-to-high socioeconomic class use technology because of its integrating features. These women feel balance when they integrate or merge their paid work and un-paid home realms. Further, they embrace the interconnectedness of their work and personal time.

Despite critical research perspectives questioning the blending and intruding nature of workplace technologies (Broadfoot, 2001), female interview participants within the mid-to-high socioeconomic bracket reveled in the integrating potential of technology. These women enjoy having permeable boundaries of their work and home lives. Moreover, this blending and integrating enables work-life balance. Specifically, Gina enthusiastically stated, "I work more than 40 hours a week, but I have balance because my work and home are connected! I stay 'connected' technologically as much as I can. I truly only 'disconnect' a few times a year, maybe a vacation or if I am out of the country." Through the conversation, Gina continued by stating, "I love that I can

work from home; I can be on a conference call and still fold laundry." Connie concurred suggesting, "Technology allows me to always connect to work. Even if I am sick or traveling, I can check-in every hour or so. It's nice to be able to do that from home or wherever I am instead of having 650 e-mails when I return, right?" These women embrace the blurring characteristics communication technologies provide. Similarly, Beatty admitted, "When I feel overwhelmed in my work-life balance, I take a 'work from home day.' I can work while I catch up on things like laundry, making beds, watering the plants. It feels like 'me' time." Sophie also likes having work she can do at home. She professed, "Often, I leave work with charts to finish, but I wait until [daughter] takes a nap. I complete my work tasks while she's sleeping. I feel productive even on days I spend with her." Ironically, working at home feels like personal time, and engaging in paid work while at home with a child seems more productive than just parenting a child. Technology provides an embraced blurring of their paid and un-paid work, ideas to be explored further at the end of this chapter. These women were not exceptions in their appreciation of integration in work and home life. Additional mid-to-high socioeconomic female participants discussed integrating work and personal time, ideas explored next.

Both *perspective* and *retrospective* mid-to-high socioeconomic female interview participants enjoy integrating work and home realms. Peg recalls

work before the heavy use of communication technologies. She shared the following story:

> I remember having no work-life balance when I was younger. When you had work that wasn't done, you stayed at work. You stayed until it was all finished. Now, I often work into the night to finish work, but I do it from home. I have much more work-life balance now because I CAN work from home.

Jeanne acknowledged similar experiences. She contended,

> Before technology, I was in work by 5 AM and would work until 7 or 8 PM each night. That is no work-life balance. Now, I can work from home early or late. I can help with my grandkids. If they are sick, I can work from home, stay with them, and my daughter can go to work. I not only have work-life balance, but I can help my family too.

In addition, Patricia agreed that using technology to blur lines between home and work helps to have balance stating, " I noticed a change in my work-life balance when two things happened: my responsibilities at home changed because my children were older and I could spend more time telecommuting from home. I think they both happened about the same time. Once I could work at home, and when my work at home changed- less homework projects, laundry, you know, doing things for my kids- I had more balance in my life." For these women, integration involves engaging in paid work and personal 'work' or time

simultaneously. Moreover, this connectedness enables these women to feel more balanced in their working lives. However, male interviewees within this same socioeconomic class did not share this hope of integration. Rather, male interview participants cited desires for segmentation over integration.

Despite their use of technology in order to achieve work-life balance, male interviewees recognized communication technologies' ability to segment work rather than integrate. For the mid-to-high male participants in this study, they experience work-life balance when they separate and segment their paid work and personal time. A number of participants used the same wording. Chris stated, "I keep work at work and home at home. That's how I have balance." Likewise, Tim argued, "You have balance when you learn how to leave work at work." Also, Michael admitted, "I have to keep work and family separate." Fred agreed by expressing, "It's hard, but I have to devote myself to work while I'm at work and my family while I'm at home." Still more, Joseph also communicated, "The only way to stay sane is to keep work and home separate." All of these men work 40 or more hours a week and use technology to stay connected to work while at home; yet, paradoxically, these men perceive to have segmentation between their work and personal time. Not only do they desire the separation in enactments, but they also believe technology allows them to have this segmentation. Thus, the following paragraphs discuss the gendered differences that emerge regarding enactments of separation.

Male interview participants within the mid-to-high socioeconomic classification described technology as a tool for segmenting enactments of time. Tim shared a story about his recent vacation with his wife to expand on this idea of segmentation.

> I am attached at the hip with my email and blackberry. It has helped me learn to have balance. I learned it's ok to work in the car; it's ok to email at home late at night; it's ok sitting at the pool in Las Vegas with a margarita. I just got back from Las Vegas last week with my wife. I can take a ten minute call while we are by the pool because that means I can get that little bit of work done, then spend the rest of the time with my wife. Because I can send a one minute email, we can go on trips. Good work-life balance is you and your laptop on the couch. You use tools to never let work interfere with what I need to do at home. I would have to work 18 hours at work otherwise. People may look at me and say I don't have balance because I am texting or emailing work from my daughter's volleyball game. At least I get to go. Without the tools, I can't go.

Even though Tim works at home on occasions and during "personal time," he does not perceive these communication technologies as blurring the lines between his work and personal life. Ironically, for him, the technologies keep his two realms of work and personal time separate. George shared a similar perception of technology offering, "I save some work for late night hours so that

my work does not impact my family, and I try to get as much work done on the phone as possible. Ideally, I would wrap up my day as I am driving home to pick up the kids, but it doesn't always work out that way." Both Tim and George use communication technologies to perform work tasks with the hope of avoiding a negative impact on their families. Sean also uses communication technologies to achieve balance in his separate realms of paid work and personal time. He stated, "My work-life story is work hard at work and take care of home at home." Sean segments his two boundaries of work and home by using his communication technology tools. Further, he discussed specific uses stating, "I have a laptop and cell phone so I can be contacted at home and have. They do it quite often when there is overtime, typically not during the week; do it a lot to know what to expect on Monday." All of these men select communication technologies as tools for achieving work-life balance. Most interestingly, these men achieve balance by using the technologies to segment their boundaries of work and personal time.

Understanding the road to balance. Even though the above descriptions of workplace technology use during off-work times resemble examples of integration and spill-over (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2005; Broadfoot, 2001; Nippert-Eng, 1996a), other research already discussed in this study, these men perceive the opposite. Rather than view the use of technologies as Broadfoot's "workaholic's hell" (p. 113), mid-to-high socioeconomic males and females in

the study view technology as enabling a desired state of balance. Communication technologies provide peace and balance. While the outcomes of this desired state may be the same for the interview participants within this dissertation study, the road to balance looks quite different across genders and socioeconomic classes. Variations explored within data thus far highlight not only differences in construals of time, but also in enactments of time as well, ideas explored first.

Despite construing time similarly as scarce, mid-to-high males and females orient to time differently. By segmenting time, male participants within this socioeconomic bracket orient toward the future; scheduling and pacing work now to have more time in the future. Their discussions of working at work or sending just one more email at home, illustrates their proclivity toward having more personal time in the future. By working in the present, they "bank" more time for the future. Because they are focused on the future, these men do not see the irony of their *perceived* segmentation. Through technological tools, these men engage in paid and un-paid work simultaneously; however, their attention toward the future clouds their present judgment.

Conversely, the females within this same socioeconomic bracket orient to the present. They view balance as a *present* experience requiring the blurring between their paid and un-paid work. As such, simultaneous flexibility, scheduling, and pace of paid and un-paid work feels like productive, personal

time. Just as the men, these women too fail to see the irony within their perceptions. Orienting to the present hinders their ability to focus on one aspect of their lives. Rather, they perform work and personal time simultaneously, multi-tasking everyday. This construal may help explain why females within this socioeconomic bracket reported experiencing more frustration than other participants. Orienting to the present provides little time for the future. As these women struggle balancing work and home lives, they feel frustrated and time impoverished, ideas explored in greater detail in chapter four. Clear gender differences emerged in both construals and enactments of time; however, gendered differences were not the only significant and important differences to emerge within the data. Serious socioeconomic differences emerged as well, implications discussed next.

As discussed in this chapter, socioeconomic class impacts the perceived path toward achieving work-life balance. First, income affects conceptions of the term "work-life" balance as well as construals of work vs. home time. "Work-life balance" carries socioeconomic connotations which are perpetuated by higher income employees and organizations using "work-life" discourse. In addition, emphasizing work-life balance highlights distinctions and differences between hourly jobs and salaried careers much like the findings of Ballard and Seibold (2000). Finally, gender differences within the data may help illuminate different perspectives of paid and unpaid work, the significant meaning of *face-*

time, and the roots of frustrations experienced by mid-to-high socioeconomic women, ideas to be addressed briefly below and more fully developed in chapter 4.

Data collected on work-life balance definitions and conceptions illustrate socioeconomic implications with the term itself. From this research, "work-life balance" is a middle and upper class construction. Through their control of time, low socioeconomic employees segment paid and non-paid work time creating a reality where work-life balance becomes the outcome of their own scheduling and separating efforts. Although they do not use the term work-life balance, low socioeconomic interviewees purported to spend adequate time on their paid and unpaid work. They cannot relate to the discourse of "work-life balance" because the discourse does not connect to their needs or reality. Low socioeconomic interviewees construct a reality of *life* involving paid work and personal responsibilities. They work their appropriate number of hours and take time when they need time to be with family members or to take care of personal issues. For these interviewees, paid work comes second to personal and family needs because paid work is "just a job." Interestingly, discontent, frustration, and resentment from the lack of flexibility inherent in their jobs and socioeconomic situations did not emerge as significant issues in the data as previous research on work-life conflict, strain, and flexibility suggested (Tomlinson, 2006; Swanberg, Pitt-Catsouphes & Drescher-Burke, 2005; Warren, 2006; Kirby et al., 2003).

Rather, low socioeconomic interviewees expressed contentment for current realities in their lives.

Emotions connecting to work-life balance, conflict, and strain emerged during interviews with mid-to-high socioeconomic females. Within this current research, those mid-to-high socioeconomic class of women reported experiencing the most frustration while striving for balance. Thus, "work-life balance" conversations evolve through social interactions of middle and upper-class workers. As these women strive to integrate their paid work and home lives, they work in the present moment seeking to "balance" their multiple performances of time. Moreover, these discussions perpetuate differences between socioeconomic classifications and demarcate distinctions in hourly jobs and careers. Only salaried women capable of merging their two world are able to conceptualize a life of "balance." For an hourly employee, paid and unpaid work must remain separated because notions of productive personal time do not exist. They get paid when they punch the clock. As a middle and upper class concept, the issue of "work-life balance" becomes real and meaningful only for those employees engaged in career building and career development not for employees working hourly jobs. Hence, socioeconomic inequalities become embedded within the concept of work-life balance. Likewise, gender inequalities also emerge by exploring the different ways mid-to-high socioeconomic men and women build their roads to balance.

As previously seen in this chapter, males and females within the mid-to-high socioeconomic class construe and enact working time differently. Both seek to have balance in their lives; yet, their everyday construals and enactments of time appear different. Specifically, with reference to integration and segmentation, men and women seek to connect work and home differently. Research may help to explain from where these differences emanate. MacDonald, Phipps, and Lethbridge (2005) and Moen and Yu (2000) explore the different enactments of men and women. They discover that women engage in more un-paid work in the home while men work more paid hours outside of the home. Additionally, *face-time* has traditionally been connected with paid work outside the home (Perlow, 1997, 1995; Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996). Mid-to-high socioeconomic men have spent more working hours outside of the home, in a physical workspace; thus, they now revel in an opportunity to work at home. Whereas they would have needed to stay at their office longer hours to finish work and maintain face-time, now they have the opportunity to leave their workspaces and finish in an alternative location. Since they equate paid work with *face-time*, they do not perceive the work they do at home in the same way they do as being at work. In this case, perceptions of segmentation make sense. Even though their enactments of time look like an integration of their work and home lives, because they are physically at home, these men view work at home as still home time. Likewise, because women have traditionally spent more time

working in the home fulfilling un-paid work responsibilities, the opportunity to engage in paid and un-paid work simultaneously seems advantageous and desired. Hence, the integration of work and home time enables these women to feel balanced.

However, because women engage in more un-paid work while at home (MacDonald, Phipps & Lethbridge, 2005; Moen & Yu, 2000), women may feel more conflict, stress, and overload (Moen & Yu, 2000) than their male counterparts. Likewise, the present orientation may also account for the increase in stress, conflict, and strain. Even more, the mid-to-high females within this current investigation also perpetuated the inequalities by suggesting that "me time" can involve paid work and productive parenting results from the simultaneous enactments of paid and un-paid work. These women still place a higher value on paid work. In doing so, they not only further perpetuate the gender inequalities implicated in the term "work-life balance," but they also participate in the creation of their own frustrations, conflicts, and strain.

While mid-to-high socioeconomic women in this study reported experiencing balance by integrating work and home life, this population also reported the most frustration, conflict, strain, and emotionality. In fact, of the nine *perspective* women interviewed in this socioeconomic category, six expressed emotionality through tears during their interviews. For these women, work-life balance exists as a significant desired state and has real impact on their lives.

Through their everyday interactions, these women socially construct notions of work-life balance. Further analysis reveals popular messages help shape their expectations of what work and home life look like in the future. As women consume popular messages, they shape their expectations of what working life should be like. Ironically, when their expectations go unmet, these same women turn to popular messages on work-life balance in order to cope with their frustrations. The following chapter further addresses the role of popular messages on work-life enactments and construals of time. Specifically, the chapter highlights the ways popular messages socialize organizational members by shaping expectations about working life. Interviews revealed all participants struggled with these unmet expectations and sought different coping strategies. For some, popular messages provided helpful insights to life challenges. For others, popular discourse did not emerge as salient to their lived experiences. Further investigating illustrates the unconscious-nature of popular discourse and potential influences on our enactments of time, all discussed next.

Chapter Four

(Im)Perfect Time

"This is not what I ordered!"
AnnMarie, 38 year-old part-time working mother of 3 children

"I used to watch the 'Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous' and think one day I will have a house like that."
George, 42 year-old working father of 4

"About two years into my marriage, I learned that Cinderella is bull shit!"
Sophie, 39 year-old part-time working mother of 1 child

Just as the desire for perceived balance between working and personal time crosses generational, gender, and socioeconomic lines, so too does the hope of a better life. When asked to reflect upon their current working lives, all interviewees expressed some degree of wanting a better/dream job and easier life. While some, like AnnMarie, discussed significant discrepancies between their expectations of work and personal time, all interviewees recognized their lives did not unfold as expected. During interviews, participants shared both unmet expectations and aspirations for a more perfect/dream life. In some cases, this recognition induced emotional reactions during the interviews. For instance, AnnMarie slammed her hands on the table and cried during our interview. However, although George expressed emotions, his were not as intense as others like AnnMarie. George, along with other male participants, laughed during a number of his responses. As such, gender differences emerged

within the data. Men and women recalled different influencing agents in shaping their expectations of enactments and construals of time. Likewise, men and women also sought different sources in coping with the outcomes associated with recognizing unmet expectations. In addition, socioeconomic characteristics affected coping strategies as well. Mid-to-high socioeconomic females appeared more influenced by popular messages and often turn to these messages when they feel frustrated, conflict, and strain. Moreover, students also seem heavily influenced by popular messages, particularly as socializing and shaping their expectations. Through most of the data, popular discourse was cited as an influential source of socializing messages shaping unrealistic expectations specifically for *prospective* and female participants. Few male participants acknowledged the role popular messages had on either shaping their expectations or providing them with coping strategies. In the following pages, I will explore unmet expectations, sources of shaping expectations, and coping strategies for dealing with discrepancies. After de-constructing each theme, I will discuss implications of my findings.

Unmet expectations. All participants admitted their life did not unfold as planned. That is, all sixty-seven interviewees recognized they had different expectations of what their life would be like. For some, the discrepancies do not affect or alter their current enactments or construals of time. These participants had vague notions of how they would perform time each day; thus, they

reported experiencing very little frustration with the discrepancies. However, other participants recognized significant differences in what they expected out of life. In these instances, participants expressed frustration and internal, emotional conflict such as Danielle who patted away tears as she shared stories about her life expectations and reality. Emotionality resulted from sharing unmet goals and unrealized expectations.

Not all interviewees expressed frustration or even disappointment with the discrepancy between expectations and reality. Many participants, particularly men, reported on the differences with either a comical or stoic tone. Javier simply stated, "It's not what I expected, but whacha gonna do?" Very matter-of-factly, Javier reconciles his unmet expectations assuming life *just* happens. For others, emotionality still existed, but they found their expectations more comical than not. For instance, Steve recognized his unmet expectations stating, "I imagined I would still work hard, but that I would get paid more [laughter]. I also thought that once you started work, you hit the ground running and move up just by doing that. Now I know, it's not just about hard work." Similarly, George shared the following story.

> No, this is really not what I expected. [laughter] I don't think I really thought about it. When I was twenty years-old, I was in the army and thought I would stay in the army, but that didn't happen. [laughter] Most

of my life I didn't have many expectations. I always seemed concerned with the next twelve months. I guess that's what kids do to you.

Both George and Steve recognized their current lives do not match their earlier expectations, but they did not seem bothered by the disparity. In fact, George sounded comical throughout the conversation interjecting laughter when he mentioned the unmet expectations. Additional men responded quite similarly to questions regarding their expectations of work.

Almost all male participants shared their stories about unmet expectations with a similar tone as Steve and George. Like George, Jeremy and James added laughter to their responses. Jeremy admitted, "I always thought I would run in the Olympics [laughter]. My year would have been 1980, you know that year we boycotted. It didn't happen [smile/laughter]. " Additionally, James touted, "I expected the big, million dollar house. [smile/laughter]" While these comical responses highlight their emotional response to the disparity between expectations and reality, these men did not seem frustrated or disappointed by the variations. Their laughter indicated an emotional reaction to their assumptions. Moreover, they were not attempting to change their performances of time in order to achieve these prior expectations. Instead of looking for ways to reconcile the discrepancies, they see these expectations as unrealistic and either undesirable or unattainable.

For many of these men, their stories represented comical thoughts of a younger, more naïve, and unknowledgeable man. Ben expressed this naïveté stating, "What I expected then? No, not like it really was. I envisioned travel, relaxation, but I didn't have an understanding of what that was." Similarly, Tim suggested, "When I was younger, I thought I would be able to put work away. I did not realize your work becomes like your child, you have to nurture it." Like Tim, Matt stated, "I didn't know parenting would be so hard [laughter]," and Mark confessed, "I guess I expected to be married and settled down, but I'm divorced and still exploring life. I guess [smile] it really is like Forrest Gump, 'You never know what you're gonna get.'" Each of these men reported recognizing differences between their expectations for work and life and the reality they experience every day. Unlike the females in this dissertation study, these men do not seem bothered by the disparity. In fact, for some, these differences offer a bit of comic relief. However, not all men made light of their expectations.

Fred was the only man to display negative emotionality while discussing the differences in his expectations and reality. When asked, "Was this what you expected your work and personal life to be like," Fred quickly responded back with, "Noooooo!" Then, he sat silent for a few moments looking down at his pad of paper on the table before adding, "I didn't expect to have kids at such a young age. I didn't expect to enter the workforce so early. I thought I would go to

college, become a lawyer or something. Life just doesn't always turn out that way." For Fred, the recognition of the disparity between his expectations and reality induced feelings of sadness, disappointment, and possibly regret. These same emotions emerged from the stories shared by the female interview participants. Working women from both the *perspective* and *retrospective* groups constructed work-life stories expressing frustration, disappointment, and guilt.

When asked to compare their previous expectations of work and personal life, all twenty-four female *perspective* and *retrospective* interviewees expressed some level of emotionality while discussing the differences they experience. For many, this acknowledgement brought about tears and frustrations as they recalled specific instances of hardship. For others, the realization induced laughter and reinforced their feelings about their current working lives. While similarities existed in the shared experiences of frustration and disappointment, the sources of this emotionality varied along socioeconomic lines. Mid-to-high socioeconomic interviewees discussed feeling guilty for not meeting expectations as a wife, mother, or employee. In contrast, low socioeconomic *perspective* females acknowledged feeling frustrated because their careers did not turn out as planned.

All of the low socioeconomic women expressed some level of dissatisfaction and disappointment with their unmet expectations of working life. Although these women expressed frustration, unlike the mid-to-high

socioeconomic females, none of them showed much emotion with regard to the discrepancies. For instance, Christy admitted, "When I was younger, I wanted to sing on stage in New York. Even into my twenties I thought, 'One day, that will be me.'" Despite not fulfilling her specific dream and expectations, Christy did not seem overly upset by the different turns her life has taken, but she did express disappointment stating, "I really felt depressed once I passed the maximum age for American Idol. I knew then, it's probably not gonna happen." Christy's unmet expectations leave her feeling disappointed by her lack of fulfillment. Much like Christy, Meagan also discussed not meeting her expectations. She offered, "I always thought I would go back to school, and still plan to once my girls get a little bit older. I thought with a degree, I could find a better job. I imagined I would do more important work. When I go back, I want to get a degree for detective work of some kind or forensic, crime scene type stuff." Like Christy, Meagan feels bouts of disappointment in not meeting her career expectations, but her disappointment does not hinder her from making new goals for her future. Additionally, Julie also discussed the discrepancies between her imagined and real life. Even though Julie set far-reaching goals for her future, she prepared herself for unmet expectations. She shared the following story,

> Yeah, my life is different. Totally. When I was eighteen, I still thought I was going to the Olympics and travel the European circuit. I thought I

> would have a shoe contract and Nike would sponsor me. You know, pay me to run great races. It wasn't until I met [ex-husband] and got pregnant that I realized, NOT GONNA HAPPEN [laughter]. But, you know, I watched my mom. She always worked hard. I never saw her; I was always alone because she took classes during the day and worked at night. So, somewhere inside, I always knew that even if you work hard, life doesn't always work out the way you plan.

Even though Julie set high goals for herself, she did not appear frustrated by her lack of fulfillment. Whereas she did express disappointment, she did so in a light-hearted way. Like some of our male participants, she discussed the disparity with a bit of humor before returning to a more serious topic. Low socioeconomic female interviewees acknowledged the disappointment they feel when faced with conversations about unmet life expectations. While these stories illustrated some level of emotionality, mid-to-high socioeconomic female interviewees expressed the most amount of negative emotion with regard to discussions about unmet expectations. Specifically, *perspective* females within the mid-to-high socioeconomic category reported and conveyed the most amount of dissatisfaction, frustration, sadness, and guilt.

All nine of the female *perspective*, mid-to-high socioeconomic interviewees expressed disappointment and shock when asked to compare their expectations of their working lives and their realities. In fact, six of the nine women cried

during the interview. Work-life balance, family, careers, and choices weighed heavy on these women, and their responses during interviews attested to as much. Most memorably, AnnMarie shared an emotional story. While sitting at a restaurant table, after hearing the questions, "How is this *working life* similar or different than you expected," AnnMarie slammed her hands on the table and said, "Let me tell you something [Researcher]. This is not what I ordered!" She continued to share her story while tears fell down her face.

> When I was in college, I met [Husband] and I knew I wanted to be a wife and mother. I was studying to be a nurse, and I saw nurses on rotations with 11-3 schedules, and I thought, 'I can do this.' When we first were married, everything seemed just as expected. We had friends, hosted parties, went to parties. We couldn't wait to have children. Then when we had [Child], our world changed. Because he is a special needs child, he requires so much. [tears] We lost friends; friends just quit coming by, and I know those are not good friends. My expectations were just always higher than kids. I wanted a job. I love my job and I love my family. I just do the best job I can do.

For AnnMarie, the differences between her expectations of life and the reality of her everyday lived experiences induced an emotional response. AnnMarie admitted, "My life is hard, and I feel guilty thinking bad thoughts. I love [child], and he has taught me a love I never knew before." The emotional response

AnnMarie feels stems from the guilt she experiences when she recognizes the disparity between what she expected, what exists, and her disappointment with the disparity. Moreover, guilt became a common thread experienced among *perspective* participants, particularly from those in the mid-to-high socioeconomic class. Much like AnnMarie, other women also reported experiencing guilt.

When asked to share their work-life stories, many *perspective* women within the mid-to-high socioeconomic class expressed feeling guilty. For instance, Sophie shared feeling guilty at times when she is unable to perform tasks she thought would be easy.

> I just think I thought I would have it more together. I thought I would have all the time in the world to just sit on the floor to play games, but it is hard. I feel so guilty when she says, 'Mama play a game with me,' [tears] but I can't because I have laundry or dinner or we have to get out of the house. I just thought I would have it more together- decently organized. You know, the whole thing like not brushing my teeth until noon, I never thought it would be that way. Come on! What I thought before to now is a huge slam in the face.

Like AnnMarie, Sophie experiences guilt from not performing time in the same way she had expected prior to having children. Similarly, Lisa also discussed feelings of guilt when she acknowledges the sacrifices she gave up for her family. For Lisa, her life did not unfold as she had planned.

> How is my life different? I have not fulfilled what I intended to fulfill. In college, I thought I would be a successful business woman. You know, CFO in a large corporation, wearing suits everyday, no children, travel to Europe, do whatever. I never thought I would spend time as a stay-at-home mom or making career choices with my family in mind. I feel guilty because I should be doing more. I was this intelligent woman [tears], and look what I am doing, substitute teaching. But then, when I start thinking and talking like this I feel guilty because I know what I am doing for my family is important. I do feel like my purpose right now is to be wife and mom. For women, we really have more expectations than men. We are expected to do it all. Even if I were able to have a career, I would be the one sacrificing. That would fall on me.

In her interview, Lisa discussed feeling guilty for both not meeting expectations and for wishing she had fulfilled them. Moreover, she mentioned the need for sacrifice which often induces additional feelings of guilt. Emily also shared in these feelings of sacrifice and guilt stating,

> Is this what I expected? No [laughter], no probably not. Then, you think life is so carefree. I did not expect all these things pulling on my time. No, it's definitely not what I expected. At some point you realize some things have to give. You can't be everywhere at once or be everything. Something gives, and you feel guilty no matter what. If it's work, you feel

like you're not doing the best you can, and if it's the kids, you feel like you are letting them down. Yeah [laughter], it's hard.

These *perspective*, mid-to-high socioeconomic female interviewees experience a great deal of frustration and disappointment in realizing their everyday work-life experiences differ from their previous expectations. As seen, low socioeconomic, *perspective* females also experience disappointment, but their emotionality is not expressed with the same level of intensity. Not only do these two groups differ in their shared responses to work-life disparities, but their coping strategies also differ as well.

Throughout the interviews, while participants discuss frustrations and disappointments, conversations inevitably turn to coping strategies for managing or dealing with the strain of work-life balance. When asked, "When you feel strain in your working life, where do you turn for help," participants responded in a variety of ways. For this question, responses varied along gender as well as socioeconomic class for females.

Coping with Life (Im)Perfections. All *perspective* and *retrospective* male interviewees reported experiencing some amounts of conflict and strain, with one exception. Johnny, a mid-to-high, *retrospective* male, reported experiencing no conflict now or in his past in his balance of work and life stating, "I always ended up automatically balancing. Why is it so hard for someone? I put enough time and effort into work without thinking. I put enough effort into personal life

without thinking." Apart from Johnny's experience, the remaining *perspective* and *retrospective* male interviewees admitted experiencing conflict and strain.

Most interviewees shared brief examples of coping strategies. Dave shared, "Where I turn for help? Alcohol [laughter]. And running. And I turn to my wife. She's pretty good with that kind of stuff." Sean discussed similar experiences, "I have a wife who understands my job is tough sometimes, and sometimes there is little room for leisure. She's understanding, and that helps. She's also a good sounding board." Michael also answered the question of where to turn for help quite simply stating, "My wife." For participants like Sean, Michael, and Dave, they use their spouses as key pillars of support to manage work and life challenges. Additionally, Sean also mentioned turning to co-workers stating, "When I do have a lot of stress at work, I often first turn to employees. If they are the source of stress, I talk to them so there is less stress." Tim shared these same strategies suggesting, "When I need help, I pull in people who are my best. I revert to being an engineer, process focused, and work through the problems with my employees. I think like an engineer, A-then-B-then-C, and I look for who are my best people." When faced with work-life strain and conflict, these men direct their attentions toward the source of the conflict, work or home, as a means to cope. Other male participants admitted to not seeking or asking for help at all.

Even though all but one male participant recognized experiencing work-life conflict and strain, many of these interviewees admitted to not seeking help to cope with the strain. For instance, Fred quickly reacted to the question, "Where do you turn for help," with, "I don't! That's my problem!" In a similar fashion, George also stated, "I guess I don't. I guess I just deal with it." Likewise, Scott answered, "I don't ask for help; I just run myself ragged. More extreme, Joseph admitted, "I just drink." When faced with strains brought about in their attempts to create more balance between their work and person lives, many men choose not to search for help in managing the strain. This avoidance strategy varies greatly from the strategies offered by the female interviewees. Not only do the female interviewees all report seeking help, but the help they seek also varies along socioeconomic lines.

When discussing ways to cope with stresses brought about by managing work and life, similarities and differences emerged within the female population. Similarly, *perspective* and *retrospective* female interviewees discussed turning to relationships for help during the conflict. Women cited turning to spouses, parents, girlfriends, and co-workers as a way to cope with the strain of managing performances of time. When asked the same questions as the men, "When you feel strain in your working life, where do you turn for help," Sophie, Danielle, AnnMarie, Gina, LouAnn, and Melanie all offered the same first response, "My girlfriends." In addition, Sophie, Lisa, and Gina suggested they call their mothers

as well. For Meagan, Christy, and Julie, their first line of coping defense begins with co-workers. Christy shared, "When I have a bad day or morning, the first thing I do when I get to work is tell my friends there. We spend the fist minutes like, "Ok, let me tell you what happened." Meagan also shared the same sentiments stating, "I can vent to my co-workers about things I can't say at home because of the kids or my husband. Usually, I just bitch about my husband." While female interviewees view relationships as playing a crucial role in helping them manage the stresses brought on by their working lives, additional probing about more specific coping strategies resulted in interesting differences related to socioeconomic class. Mid-to-high socioeconomic interviewees turned more to popular messaging for knowledge and learning, and low socioeconomic participants turned to activities for physical fulfillment.

Exploring socioeconomic differences in work-life coping strategies for female interviewees illuminated differences across class lines. For all low socioeconomic interviewees, life expectations and realities exist in opposition. Some women, such as Christy, find other physical ways to feel fulfilled but on a smaller scale. After admitting, "When I was younger, I wanted to sing on stage in New York. Even into my twenties I thought, 'One day, that will be me.' I really felt depressed once I passed the maximum age for American Idol. I knew then, it's probably not gonna happen," Christy added, "Now, I settle for singing karaoke at [Night Club] on Thursday nights. It's not New York, but I'm still on

stage." Even though Christy feels disappointed for not fulfilling her dream, she still finds a way to live out her dream, physically, by performing on a small, karaoke stage. Similarly, Julie also physically lives out her aspirations on a smaller scale. Whereas she aspired to run in the Olympics and coach track and field at the university level, she now runs with a small team of people and coaches 12 new runners after work, twice a week. When asked to elaborate, Julie commented, "I know what I'm doing does not compare to running in the Olympics or coaching somewhere like UT, but I am still getting to do what I love, and that's what matters. And, hey, I did win the distance challenge last year! It's not the Olympics, but it's got to count for something." Dorothy also offered a similar story stating, "For a long time, I thought [ex-husband] and I would start a business, but that didn't work out. I never imagined I would work here [large, corporate chain] long. I did try the cleaning thing, and I have a few houses I do, but I'm not sure I want to do that all the time." Dreams and aspirations may go unmet and unrealized, but some women try to realize their same dreams in new and revised ways. These alternative enactments take physical form. Low socioeconomic women engage in *doing* activities in order to cope with discrepancies as opposed to just thinking about differences. Mid-to-high socioeconomic women, however, spend more time engaging in cognitive activities as a way to cope. For these women, popular messages provide them with information, knowledge, and inspiration.

When faced with frustrations, disappointments, and a sense of overwhelmedness, mid-to-high socioeconomic female participants, in both *perspective* and *retrospective* categories, reported turning to popular messages and media for help. In fact, popular messages help them both at home and at work. For some, magazines, web sites, and parenting books help them cope with strain experienced at home. Specifically, LouAnn shared the following story,

> When my son entered kindergarten, he changed. His behaviors, his attitude, his demeanor. It was like I had a different kid. I didn't know what to do and that's all I thought about all day. It was hard to concentrate at work because I just kept trying to figure him out. Then a friend of mine told me about the book *Love and Logic*- I think it's part of a series. I downloaded it to my I-Phone that day. It talks about the different ways to understand and discipline your child. I love it! I feel like I am understanding him and I much better.

For LouAnn, this book provides her with knowledge and information enabling her to better cope with her stress. Emily expressed similar interests with regards to reading magazine article. She stated, "I feel the most strain in the evening. I leave work, pick up the kids, go to swim lessons, and home for dinner. Sometimes, dinner time is crazy!....I like to read parenting magazines to find helpful tips on how to manage home life better. Like, last month, they had easy, healthy dinner ideas. I thought those could help us at dinner time." Both

LouAnn and Emily find information within the pages of popular texts. Not only do these texts provide them with information they seek, but these texts also provide them with strategies should they choose to implement them. Both women indicated they have yet to apply the specific strategies they discovered in the texts; however, they both said the texts help them cope. Additional women within the mid-to-high socioeconomic category shared similar stories about the benefits of reading popular discourse for information and inspiration.

For some of these women, popular texts offer them inspiration at work and home. In particular, Beatty stated,

> When I am really stressed out at home, I watch TV shows that are stressful like ER. At my work, nobody is going to die. I also like to watch *Jon and Kate Plus Eight*. Oh my god! I only have three kids. It relaxes me. I think, "Oh, I can handle my three kids." When I watch it I realize my life doesn't suck so bad.

Watching popular media portrayals of stressful lives provides a welcoming, inspirational, and encouraging contrast to her life. In addition to watching TV shows for inspiration, Emily also admitted to reading books about work-life balance stating, "I try to read a book a month. One month, I read a business book. You know, for work. And I try to read a parenting book every other month." Gina agreed with Emily sharing,

> Do I read books? Oh yes, lots! I am an information junkie! I go to the *Working Mother* web site; I read any article I find on work-life balance; I read CNN everyday, 2-3 times a day. I love to read!...I've read tons of leadership books: *Our Iceberg is Melting*, *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, *The Leadership Secrets of Santa Clause*- our VP gave this book to my whole team. I just love books on accountability and attitude. *Attitude is Everything* is my favorite book!

Consuming popular media provides these women with motivational knowledge to manage their work and their personal time. Thus far, these women expressed interest in exploring popular texts related to work and personal time; however, *retrospective* women cited popular texts as crucial for managing just work time. Female *retrospective* interview participants within the mid-to-high socioeconomic class describe experiencing more work related strain. Nonetheless, these women still communicated the importance of reading and consuming popular texts to help with work-life conflicts.

Of the *retrospective* women within the mid-to-high class, all cited reading business books as a way to manage work-life stress. Specifically, Jeanne stated,

> I do read, but not books on work-life balance per say. I read books and go to seminars on how to be more efficient, to learn time management strategies, how to do my job faster. Really, it boils down to how do I do more in less time?...I go to seminars on time management and read on this

topic to get tips on being better at my job, using time more efficiently, so I would not waste time at work.

Interestingly, Jeanne does not claim to read books on work-life balance, but rather, on time management *at work*. At this stage in her life, she experiences more stress at work than at home; thus, she sees more need for time management in her work setting as opposed to home. Similarly, Connie also cited reading popular books and texts on time management to perform her job better. She shared her story below.

> Do I read and attend seminars? Oh yeah, oh yeah! I love to read! I have tons of books on personal effectiveness, and I have an obsession with time management. I watch all these people make to-do lists, and they are ineffective. I see other leaders in my organization, and they are ineffective with their time. I always look for effective ways to manage time as a leader. You know, how to get the most out of your people. Peter Walsh has this great book on audio. The message rings true, and his voice is just so entertaining. He is Australian, and he does this thing, "Does this clutter make my butt look fat?" [laughter] I also read personal leadership books: Goldman, *Primal Leadership*, organizational dynamic stuff, how leadership functions… I look for the same thing in the books that I do a seminar; not ONE answer or ONE Bible. It's for every person, an

> amalgamation. I'm getting bits of perspectives and a way out against your aggregate of life experiences to see what makes sense.

Connie consumes these texts in order to make sense of her life and cope with the challenges she faces. In particular, she seeks to lead her team better and hopes these texts can enable her to so do. Peg also uses popular books as a means to manage working stress hoping to find strategies to help her job. Peg confessed that she hates to read self-help books; rather, she prefers to read non-fiction, business books that offer real-life examples. She argued, "I read books like *One Minute Manager*, *48 Laws of Power*, *Who Stole My Cheese?*, and *The Anti-10 Commandments*. These are *real* stories, not theoretical." Just as the *perspective* women within this category, these *retrospective* women also site popular texts as coping mechanisms while dealing with the stress and strain working life ensues. As compared to low socioeconomic women, the middle and upper class women in this study rely on more cognitive activities to cope with the strain of working life.

As seen, women within the mid-to-high socioeconomic category manage the stress of working life differently than other populations. Whereas both low and mid-to-high women rely on relationships in their lives, low socioeconomic females spend more time *doing* activities as a way to reconcile discrepancies between their imagined life and their reality. Mid-to-high socioeconomic females, on the other hand, spend time engaged in cognitive activities, *thinking*

about how to manage their stresses. The most interesting aspect about this finding relates to the reported source of these imagined expectations. When asked to reflect upon what has shaped these unmet expectations, most females, primarily mid-to-high socioeconomic, and only a few men acknowledged popular messages as socializing texts shaping their expectations of the future. Further, interview data within *prospective* group also revealed the strength of popular discourse on shaping young students' expectations for the future.

Popular Mediated Messages Shape Expectations. Throughout many of the interviews, participants mentioned popular messages and popular media as an influencing factor shaping their expectations of work and life. Primarily in *prospective* and female interviews, participants acknowledged particular images, television shows, and pop-cultural-type references as key elements to shaping their expectations. For college students, the prevalence and overwhelming number of references to popular discourse highlights the socializing qualities of popular messages (Jablin, 2001; Hassard, 1991).

During *prospective* interviews, all of the interviewees discussed popular media and/or messages. While some of these students made specific, direct references to programs or messages in response to the question, "What has shaped these expectations," other students offered pop cultural examples in their descriptions of their future working lives. Moreover, *prospective* interviewees,

both male and female, provided more vivid, concrete, and specific description of the popular messages than either of the other generational categories.

As students begin to imagine their future work and personal time, many of them recognize the influencing role popular messages play on shaping those imagined expectations. When asked to share their expectations and reflect upon what shapes these expectations, many students can specifically recall popular messages shaping those expectations. For instance, when asked about his future work and person life, Andy replied, "I'm gonna live in one of four places: Colorado, Maine, Desoto, Mississippi, or Ireland." When asked to explain why he chose these four locations, he further offered, "I saw images of these place online and they look really cool." Other students had similar epiphanies related to popular messaging and their future lives. As seen earlier, John constructed a very specific expectation about how he will spend his days as an entrepreneur traveling the world, managing from afar, and moving to action by his own conviction. When asked to expand on where these expectations come from, John shared the following story.

> I have been reading so many books about success. You know, the "here's how I succeeded" kind of stories. I read the *Four Hour Work Week*. It's pretty interesting. It teaches you how to streamline, out source, and live on just what you need. I also really liked Richard Branson's autobiography *Virgin*. He's one of the wealthiest people and he rarely

ever wears a suit. Guys like him and Mark Cuban, they have fun; they don't work. I saw an interview with Mark Cuban. In the interview he said, "I haven't worked a day in my life." These guys, they are my heroes.

Joe was able to recall specific popular messages read in books and seen on TV that have shaped his ideas and expectations about his future working life. In fact, when probed about what he hopes to discern from reading these books, John exclaimed, "Their ideology!" For John, these stories and characters represent a sense of what is real and what is possible. Riley also illustrated her assumptions and expectations about the *realness* of popular messages. She stated, "I know that my first job is going to be hard; 50 hours a week, pay my dues. You know, you see it on the office; it's funny, but it's sad. I'm going to be working for someone I think I'm smarter than." These students consume popular messages, construct their expectations about their future, and realize these messages play a part in this construction. Additional student interviews offered similar perspectives; although, some students seemed less overtly aware of the influencing potential popular messages have on them.

Whereas some students mentioned popular messages in reference to discussing the sources of influence on their future life expectations, other students introduced aspects of popular messaging as evidence and examples for their future enactments of time. For example, three female students mentioned the HGTV television show "Flip This House." All three women expressed

interest in wanting to engage in house flipping as a leisure or hobby in their future. Specifically, Stephanie expressed, "I would love to flip houses with my husband in our free time, like for our hobby, and we can do it together." Follow-up probes indicated Stephanie does not have a current boyfriend or plan for marriage, but knows she would like to be married and flipping houses in the future. Further, she sites HGTV as the source from which she has seen this show. Similarly, Rose also mentioned "Flip This House" and asked, "How cool would it be if we [boyfriend and potential husband] could do just one house in the beginning, maybe right after we are married? We could have a nest-egg in savings before our first nine months!" Not only do these students see these mediated messages as potential realities, but they are also inspired and motivated by them. In particular, Sharon discussed how motivated she feels watching MTV stating, "When I watch shows like Cribs, I feel motivated. It really motivates me. I watch these guys, and I think, 'Man, I can do that? I can do what they do.'" Still more, Ava admitted that movies inspire her and teach her life lessons. She developed this idea further offering the following example.

> You know the movie *The Family Man*, with Nicholas Cage. Before, his life was so depressing. Success in his career was the important thing, and the only thing in his life. I can't relate to that. But then, he sees this glimpse of a life with kids, a family, and other important things. That's what I want; a meaningful life.

Students watch, consume, and appropriate popular messages. In the end, these messages create a reality and set of expectations for how their futures will unfold. Looking from the outside, these expectations appear lofty, immature, and unrealistic. However, the influencing potential of popular messages emerged not only in the data for the *prospective* group, but also for mid-to-high socioeconomic females as well.

When asked to reflect upon the sources shaping work-life expectations, mid-to-high socioeconomic females in both *perspective* and *retrospective* groups recognized the role popular media and messages played in helping them construct their work-life stories. Whereas all participants, across all groups, acknowledged the role family messaging plays in shaping expectations, further confirming Medved et al. (2005), only a few men mentioned popular messages or media as a factor. George admitted, "I used to watch the 'Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous' and think one day I will have a house like that." Likewise, low socioeconomic females rarely discussed popular messages either. In fact, Julie bluntly stated, "I saw all those images. I saw the women in the magazine; on TV. I also saw my mom, and I knew that wasn't real. I knew those images were not real." For mid-to-high socioeconomic females, the images in magazines, on TV, and permeating mass culture seemed *real* and had real implications on their expectations of working life.

For mid-to-high socioeconomic women within this study, the influence of popular media came right to the forefront of conversations related to unmet expectations. Some women became passionate in their discussions of *societal pressures* while other women expressed emotionality when they realized the dream was not reality. Peg exalted, "We were products of the 70's. You know, our moms didn't work, and everyone said, 'Hey, you want to work? So, go to work.' We were products of traditional mothers, and we were trying to be superwomen; to have great careers. All we heard was we could do it all." Similar to Peg, LouAnn launched into a critique of Western gender inequalities making this argument when asked to reflect upon her sources of socializing messages.

> Media has really done a lot of that. On TV, I think mostly. When I was younger, I would watch shows like "Law and Order," knowing or thinking they were successful. On TV, most women do have it all. There's very few June Cleavers anymore, and she wasn't real. You don't put make up on and pearls to stay home all day. And at the opposite side of the spectrum, what is it now, "Desperate Housewives", who have sex with all their neighbors, and that's not real either. And yet, we are still expected to do it all. Society expects us to do it all.

Not only does LouAnn make a large, cultural critique about public discourse relating to gender, but she also references specific popular television programs and personalities. She is, on the one hand, critiquing the system, and on the other hand playing into the same system, and LouAnn is not the only mid-to-high socioeconomic female interviewee to mention specific popular messages or images.

Most of the mid-to-high socioeconomic females could reflect on a specific influencing message. Jeanne referenced a specific popular message stating, "I remember hearing, and singing [laughter], the proverbial 'workin 9 to 5,' I just assumed those were low paying jobs. I didn't think those were *real jobs* or jobs for career-minded women. So, I worked and worked. I put in some hours!" Sophie also mentioned a specific, iconic message, trying to hold back tears saying, "About two years into my marriage, I learned Cinderella is bullshit! They don't talk about car payments and insurance. And Cinderella did not get knocked up that quickly." Patricia added, "Aren't I supposed to say, 'I am woman, hear me roar' [laughter]. That's what really sticks in my head from my early career. I was supposed to roar, whatever that meant." Even more, Melanie recalled using popular music to inspire her as she started her business.

> When I started [Non-profit Organization], I was really out of my league. I had passion for what I wanted to accomplish, but I had no money- I used credit cards for all the start-up cash- and no experience in how to run a

> successful non-profit organization. I just had a really great idea and a really great plan. So, every morning, I would get up and play the 'Mary Tyler Moore' theme song [laughter]. That became my theme song, and it inspired me everyday. I knew I could do it! I could make it through each day.

Reflecting on specific messages, these women recognized the influencing power popular messages had on shaping their construals and enactments of time. Not only were these women able to acknowledge the role popular media played in shaping their expectations of working life, but they also recalled specific messages shaping their views. These messages shaped their expectations of how they should perform their work and personal time as well as how they should construct and define time. Because these women consumed messages inducing them to believe they could and had to "do it all," the challenge for them became how manage and balance the multiple roles, identities, and realms in which they needed to engage (Kirby, et al., 2003). Not surprisingly, terms such as "work-life" balance became useful, appropriate, and needed to meet their demands and expectations. More surprisingly, when demands and expectations exceed current abilities and time, these women turn to popular media and messages to cope and manage their differing realities. "Work-life balance" emerges through social constructions of middle and upper class women negotiating their expectations and assumptions about working life, and yet, these women

perpetuate their own entrapment by turning back to the original source of their discontent. In doing so, they perpetuate this cycle of disappointment, frustration, and guilt.

Perpetuating the Cycle. As research suggests and data has supported (Jablin, 2001; Hassard, 1991) popular messages about work and personal life socialize organizational members to create a set of expectations for their working lives. Although previous research has not explored the implications of this socializing effect, this current study draws key conclusions based on interview data. Popular messages not only shape middle and upper class women's expectations of work and personal time, but they also provide a means to cope with the disparities created by unmet expectations. In the end, the consumption of these messages perpetuates feelings of disappointment and guilt. As these women work to fulfill their positive performance of personhood (Kirby et al., 2003), they become frustrated by their inability to perform as they imagined. Reflecting upon unmet expectations involves reflecting on more than just a series of events that did not happen. Reflection entails questioning the core of their identities. The work-life messages and discourse appears more salient for the mid-to-upper class females; thus, they reference, appropriate, and seek out additional messages to help them adjust to their identity crises. As their identities become questioned, they reflect negatively upon themselves and this negativity manifests as guilt; guilt for not fulfilling their identities as intelligent,

hardworking, career women AND attentive, nurturing, always present mothers. Further, because the "work-life balance" construct grows out of a privileged position, the notion of "Mommy Guilt" also has socioeconomic implications.

Although the struggle faced by the upper and middle class women represents a *real* challenge, this struggle grows out of a privileged position. The mid-to-high socioeconomic females have the opportunity and fortune to reflect upon their lives in such a way to consider alternatives. They can afford to imagine and reflect upon the identities they desire to embody. Low socioeconomic women do not have that option. For low socioeconomic, working mothers, every hour counts. For them, every hour worked means more food on the table and coats for their children in the winter. They cannot and do not feel guilty because their life circumstances do not offer them the opportunity. Further, they cannot identify or connect with messages on work-life balance. In fact, as seen in chapter three, some low socioeconomic females dis-identify with work-life balance messaging stating, "That is only for manager." Although, the term "work-life balance" had more saliency with the mid-to-high socioeconomic males than low socioeconomic females, male interview participants still did not express or illustrate the same emotionality as their female counterparts. More still, students, both male and female, seem poised for the same identity crises, disappointment, and guilt as the mid-to-high socioeconomic females. Future exploration may seek to longitudinally explore the same *prospective* and

perspective male interviewees over a period of time to discern if gender differences help explain the emotional differences discovered here, or if popular messaging plays a more significant role. Data gathered within this current investigation does not support the initial theoretical assumptions presented within the first chapter of this dissertation, result explored next.

The most surprising revelation in this analysis is the lack of recognition or attention the male population gave to the influencing or coping power of popular discourse. With the exception of the *prospective* male participants, few men consciously shared specific examples of popular messaging. Previous research (Webster & Gossett, 2006) pointed to the prevalence of popular discourse in shaping perceptions and behaviors at work. However, when asked to reflect upon what has shaped their work and home life expectations, most men in this current study failed to recall specific, popular messages. Interestingly though, on a few occasions, male participants referenced popular discourse without the conscious knowledge of or connection to shaping expectations. For instance, both Scott and James discussed the enjoyment of "surfing the web" for information, pictures, and stories. The Internet offers a variety of popular messages both men could consume while surfing. In addition, Sean offered a specific instance of popular messaging when quoting Forrest Gump. Despite not recalling popular messages while probed for socializing structures, Sean gave a specific instance to illustrate his point that we often do

get what we expect out of life. Although the men within this investigation did not explicitly offer popular messages as socializing their work-life expectations, some of them unconsciously admitted to their influences. Popular discourse may operate at a more unconscious level making it not only more challenging to investigate, but also more interesting. Organizational members may not recognize their taken-for-granted assumptions stem from popular discourses related to work and personal life. As popular messaging becomes more pervasive to younger generations, the influence may become more apparent, an idea discussed next.

Although research data illustrate gender differences between the older adult populations (*perspective* and *retrospective*), no apparent gender differences emerged within *prospective* group. The pervasiveness of popular media now as opposed to the past (Seabrook, 2000) may account for the similarities in male and female *prospective* interviewees. Maybe these students consume, appropriate, and identify with similar messages. However, an alternative explanation questions the role of gender within research. That is, these dissertation findings may be better understood by questioning the role gender played in the research process. The final chapter to this dissertation does just that. The remaining textual pages provide an ethnographic account of the research process and data interpretation/analysis revealing an alternative approach to understanding the data. By considering gendered interviewing spaces, my gendered physical body,

and my gendered subjectivity, interviewee responses can be viewed as socially desirable, induced, and co-constructed. Each of these themes and implications are developed further in chapter five.

Chapter Five

My Time:
An alternative, ethnographic perspective on work-life narratives

"You know what your problem is? You are trying to focus on having a meaningful career, having a satisfying marriage, being a great mom. Pick two. You can do two of those things well."

Dr. Douglas, Full Professor, married, father of 4 children

"That's the difference between yours and my generation. You grew up believing you could have it all. I knew I couldn't."

Josie, researcher's mother, married, working mother of 3 children

Interesting findings related to balance and popular messaging have resulted from this dissertation data thus far; however, because this data unfolded through social interactions, it should be understood as such. The stories shared in the interviews emerged through conversations between people, in time, and within a physical space. Thus, space, bodies, and time provide a frame from which to understand and interpret meanings inherent within these stories. Physical space influences the depth and breath of topics such that some topics may be encouraged within one space and cut of within another. For instance, a discussion of life failures may be appropriate in a very intimate setting; however, the same topic would not be appropriate within the confine of a more public space. Moreover, the physical body communicates a variety of dimensions (age, sex, gender, race, socioeconomic) through conscious and non-conscious acts or adornments which impacts the social interaction as well. A researcher cannot

remove biological sex or race from their bodies. These communicative dimensions accompany every social interaction in which a researcher engages. Anthropologists often wrestle with the challenges fieldworkers face when their physical body does not conform to the native culture's social order (Warren, 1988). Additionally, with each interview, my own biases, interests, and awareness infiltrated the interaction as I became sensitized to some concepts (van den Hoonaard, 1997), probably ignored others, and probed more deeply into specific aspects that I deemed more pertinent and interesting. My presence, gender, socioeconomic class, race, personal connection, body, and space all played a part in helping to not only construct the stories shared in the interviews, but also shape my analysis of the data as well. Moreover, these interviews occurred at specific points in time. Larger cultural and historical issues will emerge at different points in time. Thus, the following chapter problematizes issues of gender and time by exploring the impact of space, physical bodies, and subjectivities on research processes and data interpretations.

Armed with the same interview protocol, a different researcher would explore, find, and discover different results. Maanen, Manning, and Miller (1988) describe ethnographic conceit arguing, "Fieldworkers would like to believe that whatever they see, hear, and write up as a result of their research experience in a particular setting is what any other similarly trained and situated fieldworker would see, hear, and write up" (p. 5). That is, a male graduate

student asking these same questions would undoubtedly attend to different exigencies and would elicit different responses from participants than I. To avoid ethnographic conceit, this chapter explores the extent to which my gender mattered during the research process. Further, this alternative, ethnographic account of my dissertation provides an additional interpretation of interview data as well as a critique of truth in academic research and the pervasiveness of gender scripts in our everyday lived experiences. As such, analyzing fieldnotes written after interviews were conducted and interview data previously discussed within this dissertation highlights the significance of my gender and its impact on my own interpretations. Moreover, my gender provides an interesting lens through which to view this current investigation.

Warren (1988) provides a useful framework for understanding gender in field research. Rather than view gender as an object of fieldwork negotiations as her predecessors, Warren argues gender exists "as part of the structural grounds upon which negotiation takes place" (p. 9). Below, a reflexive analysis of my physical space, physical body, and subjectivity I explore gendered readings of my interview data.

My En-gendered Physical Space. If gender provides us with the structural basis from which to engage our interactions, the physical space provides the backdrop to our interaction, further complicating the web of meanings constructed throughout the interaction. Moreover, anthropologists and

sociologists have explored gendered, or spaces confined to one sex more so than the other (Warren, 1988; Sudarkasa, 1986). Within a physical space, interactions evolve upon a gender structure from which we cannot escape. As such, we should view the impact of space on our interpretations. A physical space may highlight emotionality, power, social order, inequalities, and connectedness. Analyzing field notes from different physical spaces sheds interesting light upon interview data.

> Field notes. Wednesday, July 16, 2008. 6:00 PM. South Louisiana. Walking from my car, I cannot help feeling uneasy, nervous, and out of my element. The landscape juxtaposition within this small, south Louisiana city of new and old, wealth and poverty, prosperity and desolation, marks a stark contrast from my homogenous, middle-class street back home. Staring straight, I see the great sea wall holding back the Atchafalaya River, and I see reminisces of a once flourishing port, now rusted, but still adorned with flags and anchors. To my right, I see broken down shacks, an old, rusted swing sets in one front yard, and what looks like an old refrigerator next to the curb of another. To my left, I see the shops on Front Street. As a whole, Front Street shows signs of time, weather, and a brutal south Louisiana economy. A few store fronts, however, shine and show promise of a new day. One such front is my destination, Mimi's Italian Restaurant. According to my sister-in-law,

Vivian, this is one of the hottest new spots in town, and she graciously helped to set up a series of interviews for me. She reserved me a table in the back and signed up 4 of her friends to interview with me for my dissertation, staggering them each at 1 hour intervals. I have had similar interview schedules with organizations. In fact, I have spent a number of 8-hour days with organizational members gathering field notes, attending meetings, and interviewing members. I have even had lunch interviews at coffee shops and small, local diners. But tonight feels very different. First, my attire seems unnatural and inappropriate for a researcher. I am wearing an orange, brown, white, and pink floral, loose-fitting, halter top, white linen skirt, and white, heeled sandals. I asked Vivian about the dress code for the restaurant before arriving, and she advised me to dress how I would if I were going out with my girlfriends or my husband. Although, this attire matches her description, I still feel out of my element. I plan to ask some thought provoking questions. I wondered, "Will these women take me seriously dressed this way?" As I entered Mimi's, it was as though I stepped through Alice's looking glass in both time and space. Decorated like Sinatra's Hollywood, this space did not connect to the world outside its door. The dim lights and candle lit room caused my eyes to adjust as I stepped inside. Rich, velvet hues of purple, red, and brown were draped over the two front windows, door way leading to

outside and upstairs, booths, and both sides of the bar from the ceiling. A woman, appearing in her late forties to mid-fifties wearing a black sleeveless, shell blouse, black slacks, and black, strappy sandal heels, greeted me promptly and showed me to my table. I was surprised not to hear a South Louisiana accent in her voice. When I arrived at the table, I was struck by the vast size of the table, booth, and odd seating arrangement. The table was round, able to seat 5-6 comfortably; yet, one side was pushed into a booth with a tremendously high back. Only one or two people could fit on the booth seat. It was an odd coupling of circular and rectangular shapes. Three other chairs were positioned around the table opposite the booth. Since I was to be seated at this table for at least the next four hours, I sat in the booth and waited. As I waited for the first interviewee to arrive, I watched the other guests either get lost in the conversations at their table or eat in silence. As I glanced from table to table, I noticed an interesting pattern. There were only two distinct groups of people there that evening. I saw two, elderly couples each eating at their own small table, and I saw two groups of women as well. The elderly couples both already had their entrees, and it appeared, were nearing the end of their meal. Even though both couples appeared content, neither looked at their spouses nor spoke. Both couples ate their food in silence. Then, I saw three women sitting together at the bar, each

enjoying a glass of red wine from the bottle on the bar. The final group was another group of women (4) seated at a round table much like mine, appearing relaxed, and enjoying glasses of wine as well. At 6:07, AnnMarie joined me for an interview and ordered a crab cake appetizer.

As I analyze and interpret the interview data from my evening at Mimi's, I must consider the setting and physical space to have a better understanding of the experiences shared. Of the nine mid-to-high socioeconomic female *perspective* interviewees, four came from that evening. Moreover, as mentioned, 6 of the nine participants expressed emotionality in tears during the interview. All four interviewees at Mimi's cried; all four women expressed serious emotion and frustration during the interaction. Observations of Mimi's guests that evening suggest this restaurant might provide young women a comforting space to vent, share, talk, connect, and enjoy the company of other women. In light of Vivian's comment and suggestion of using the restaurant, I assume that these four friends convene in this same space to share stories and express emotions about their every day life experiences on a regular basis. Had I asked questions unrelated to their work and personal time, I may have collected very different emotionality, or maybe not. The familiarity within the space, including informality and intimacy of relationships, changed the interviewer-interviewee relationship into a conversation between girlfriends. As such, the content and emotions shared may, or may not, represent an accurate expression of their perceived realities;

however, using these interviews as representative of a larger class questions its academic validity. The engendered space provides the structure from which emotional tales of disappointed and guilt-stricken women emerge. Exploring field notes from other physical spaces further sheds light on interview responses.

> Field notes. Tuesday, March 17, 2009. 3:00 PM. Large, chain corporation. Central TX. I just completed the first five interviews at [Large Corporate Chain]. Finally, the months of trying to gain access paid off!! Since January, I have called to inquire about access. With each week came the excuse, "Uh, this week is hard, but try to catch me back early part of next week." My hopes to collect 30 interviews within their space diminished when I finally received access, and the managers reduced my number to 10, with the promise that I would share transcripts. Because I desperately wanted variety in gender, age, and socioeconomic class within my interviews, I agreed without hesitation or reserve. In hindsight, I would have refused. Since I offered to share transcripts with management, I had to divulge this information with participants. This was one of the hardest aspects to the interviews today; although, I assured interviewees that management just wants to be sure *I* am not asking inappropriate questions or making inappropriate remarks about the organization. Still, I did wonder if this knowledge hindered openness with my interviewees.

Upon entering [Corporation] I felt nervous. Intentionally, I dressed more casually than I would like to dress when meeting people. I wore a light blue t-shirt with frayed neck and sleeve-lines, blue jeans, and brown Merrill walking shoes. That morning, I decided to allow my hair to air-dry curly as opposed to blow-drying straight. My straightened hair offers more of an air of sophistication than my curly locks. Also, I chose to avoid jewelry except for my engagement and wedding rings and my running watch.

I arrived at 9:00 AM. Usually, I come to this store with a specific purpose, and I walk directly to my destination. Today, I was not sure where to go or who to contact for assistance. I had no plan; no interview schedule. Diane, my gatekeeper, informed me I could come today, "Anytime!" I sent a text-message to Diane hoping she could direct me to my destination. As I waited for her response, I explored the front of the store. I noticed very few people shopping during that time. Of all the front cashier openings, only four had lights on and only two had customers. The Customer Service counter had most of the action that morning. Three people stood in line waiting for assistance. The first woman had an armful of little girls' clothing of which she wanted to return it all. Next, the middle-aged man behind her held up a long box. From the picture on the box, it appeared he was returning a fan. Finally, the third person, a

younger woman, stood waiting with an empty shopping cart. I tried to imagine what questions she might have that would motivate her to wait in line behind the returns. Then I found myself waiting behind her when I did not hear back from Diane. As I waited in line, I could feel my stomach turn and jump as I feared the managers changed their minds. Had Diane heard something, but she was afraid to tell me? As I waited my turn in line, I examined the people around me.

We now had four people waiting in line at the customer service counter. Two women worked behind the counter, but one, clearly had a complex or challenging task for which she was trying to solve while talking with someone on the telephone. Her voice alternated between Spanish and English; Spanish while on the phone and English while looking through computer files and talking on her walky-talky. When my turn came, I asked for the manager. The clerk looked at me with an air of suspicion wondering if there is something with which she could help me.

By 9:20, the manager arrived to escort me to the back. He wore a wrinkled, light blue, button-up shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. He looked both interested in what I was doing there, "I'm just glad I can help," he would say, and annoyed with my presence at the same time. He referenced Diane as we walked between the frozen food section and women's fashion. I learned Diane doesn't come into work until 10:30.

Once we reached the end of the infant section of the store, he led me through two, beige hallways, first to the right, then to left leading to the back of the store and ending at the break room, just before the massive warehouse. The hallway walls had no adornment; nothing decorative or organizationally-focused hung on the walls.

The break room was smaller than I imagined for a store this size and number of employees. There were seven small, white, round tables scattered through the middle of the room. Each table had 2-3 red or blue curved chairs beside them. To my left stood a plain white refrigerator next to a small kitchenette with counter. On the counter, I saw a microwave, coffee pot, can opener, and toaster. A small sink separated the microwave and the remaining appliances. To my right, the wall was broken up by two doors, one male and one female bathroom. Beige walls surrounded the room, but these walls did contain more adornment than the hallways. Near the kitchenette, two posters hung on either side; one addressing food handling/hand washing tips and one focusing on "Covering Your Cough." Similarly, the women's bathroom had a step-by-step guide to proper hand washing translated in both English and Spanish. On the other walls, employees hung posters and pictures of events. For instance, two women allowed co-workers to shave their heads in order to raise money for a fellow co-worker who had large medical

bills. Two posters filled with taped pictures from the event were taped to one wall. The traditional "Teamwork" poster with the rowing team was visible on the other wall along with the local high school football and volleyball posters/schedules. Long rectangular florescent light boxes lit up the room.

Once I arrived at the room, [Manager] explained I could interview any employee who comes into the room as long as I explain my intent. I reassured him by showing my IRB consent forms. With this, he nodded and left. Was he really just leaving me here? As he left me in the room by myself, I began to examine the room and construct a script for meeting employees as they entered the space. I had imagined either Diane or [Manager] would guide or lead employees to me. I had nearly an hour before Diane intended to arrive for work. This was new territory for me. As I sat reflecting upon my previous interview experiences, I realized, I have never conducted a cold interview. All my interviewees, in the past, had some connection to me through work, family, or friends. As I sat exploring this new world, I waited for either a new face to join me in the break room or Diane's arrival at work. Either way, I had time to investigate this strange land and look for clues to help me understand natives' work-life balance.

Despite familiar ornamental wall hangings, the stark corporate break room stood in opposition to the intimacy of Mimi's candle lights. Florescent bulbs created an exposed, masculine space possibly affecting open and honest communication. Within the space, interview participants still shared personal stories; however, stories lacked intense emotionality seen at Mimi's. Within the break room, emotions centered on comical experiences such as Claudia's perception of the "work-life balance" term stating, "Oh yeah, that's just for managers [laughter]," and examples and experiences focused on work relationships as opposed to personal. Within the masculine work space, employees felt the managers' gaze even without their presence. Additionally, knowing their transcripts may be read further complicated and engendered the space. I interpret break room responses as distant, calculated, and cautious, essentially masculine in quality. The space encourages "good behavior" and responses varied little from that.

The engendered qualities of the physical space provided the structure upon which the interviews unfolded. By selecting particular settings, I co-constructed different narratives for the different spaces. Within the intimacy of Mimi's, participants and I wove stories of warmth, emotion, and closeness. Participants casted themselves as oppressed victims seeking to right past wrongs. In the break room, we constructed distant, uninvolved, and rational stories. Rather than victims, these participants starred in their own versions of

success. Understanding the gendered structures of physical space highlights why some low socioeconomic individuals appeared more "in control," less burdened by life stresses, and less frustrated by unmet expectations. Through the lens of gender, these responses seem appropriate and expected. In addition to physical space, the physical body also provides a structural basis from which to interpret interview data, ideas explored next.

My Body. In order to conduct fieldwork, researchers must insert their physical presence into another's culture. This access may entail physical proximity where the researcher seeks to participate in or watch organizational rituals and practices which may be cut off to the outside world, thus posing challenges for access. Additionally, researchers also seek internal access to their participants hoping to investigate the participants' perspectives, thoughts on their experiences, and ideas. Moreover, gender may play a key part in restricting this access. From Warren's own research in a drug rehabilitation center, she discovered, "There are settings where initial entry is not as restricted by gender, but where internal access is affected by it" (Warren, 1988, p. 18). Participants may not open all worlds to the researcher. When researchers enter the field, participants respond according to their assumed position the researcher holds within the proper social order. This assumption stems from the visible, or hyper-visible, physical body of the researcher. Interview interactions involve real bodies visibly displaying size, shape, color, adornment, and movement.

Interrogating the gendered presence of *my* physical body illuminates gendered differences within data.

> Field notes. Saturday, August 1, 2009. 1:00 PM. Central Texas. I have just finished collecting interviews from the Saturday morning long run group. This strategy was quite effective, and I plan to do it again at the end of the month. I was surprised by the attendance, show of support, and general willingness to help me succeed. I feared runners would see me as a burden or be saddened Duane did not come to lead the group.
>
> The morning started just after 5 am. I arrived early to set up in the yoga studio. When I first arrived, I had conflicting emotions. On the one hand, I wanted the get a long run in that morning too. I had been running 8 mile runs by myself, and I jumped at the thought of having companions for an even longer route. On the other hand, I was excited to find another way to solicit interviewees for my dissertation. I will have to run later.
>
> I dressed just as though I was planning to run: white Chicago Marathon t-shirt, black Nike running shorts, running store hat, pony tail, and Brooks running shoes, no socks. I suspected I would know most of the runners, but I wanted to be recognized as a runner for those who did not know me.
>
> When I entered the yoga studio, I could smell incense remaining from the Friday night class. The smell provided a welcoming change from the thick, molded humid air outside. Once inside, I only turned on half the

lights hoping to add to the warmth of the room. I found two long tables and placed them on either side of the doorway. On one table, I placed the route choices for the day, a sign-in sheet, and a key box. Runners had six choices of distances ranging from 3-14 miles. Duane had asked me to describe each route first before letting everyone go. Learning each route was more challenging than I thought it would be. On the other table, I placed three large, turkey-roasting size tins filled with after-run treats: fig newtons, oranges, apples, and bananas. I thought interviews would be easier if I offered them food after the long run. I also used the treats to develop my pitch.

I had previously told some of my fellow morning group runners that I would lead the long run on that Saturday morning so Duane could sleep late. Everyone thanked me for offering to do this. I assumed more thank yous would follow, so I constructed my pitch based on that assumption: "I am leading the run group today so Duane can finally sleep in this summer. However, rather than see this as a purely self-less act, please know I have a motive. I have brought you tasty treats to eat after your run, and my selfish hope is that you will agree to stay after and talk with me about my dissertation. I am collecting interviews on work-life balance. Specifically, I am collecting stories, and I would love to record your story if you will let me." I was shocked by the response! No only did I receive

laughs from the runners waiting to begin their run at 6:30, but I also received questions, support, and commitments from those agreeing to stay and interview. Runners began arriving at 5:45. Jennifer, Rick, and Rueben were first to arrive. After they signed in, we began talking about new running shoes. Jennifer and Rick had just bought a new pair, but Rick fears they are wrong for his feet. I began asking about his shoe fitting experience and suggested he connect with Duane once the store opened at 10. More runners began arriving. Thirty-six signed up this morning. I mingled throughout the crowd, talking with my running group members about the race at the end of August. We also joked with Michael about his run in the San Francisco Marathon one week earlier and wondered why he came to run this morning. I also met some new runners and answered questions about breathing and pace. At 6:32, I feared runners might leave before my pitch, so I began even though a three more runners were still walking up to sign in. After my pitch, I explained each route, first soliciting raised hands to indicate who intended to run the route. After explaining all six routes, I gave a hearty, "Ok, well…ready, set, GO!" By 6:39, I was alone and remained that way for 25 minutes and 48 seconds.

A critical read of my physical body on the first run-group interview day helps explain why I failed to gain internal access to male interviewees. Although male interview participants acknowledged unmet expectations, many

participants struggled with providing detailed examples and experiences of either the shaping of their expectations or their coping with unmet expectations. As shallow and cursory accounts of their lives, most male interviews lacked the depth that female interviews provided. My physical body occupied a specific place within the social order of the run group. My petite, muscular frame stood at the front, leading, guiding, and controlling group behaviors and attitudes. On this morning, my physical presence embodied both masculine and feminine traits; however, my specific place within this social order positioned me with power and knowledge. From this lens, participant responses to interview questions resemble socially desirable expressions of those wanting acceptance or approval within this community. Not only did interviewees avoid deviant responses during the interviews, but they also avoided negativity. Even while discussing unmet expectations, male participants laughed and brushed off negative connotations, re-framing as the near-sightedness of a younger man. Male participants rarely shined a light toward their inadequacies, especially in their discussions of coping strategies. Admissions of failures would position these men as less powerful and desirable. Moreover, participants who run with me during workout sessions, compete against my physical body on a daily basis. Interviews became extensions of that competition.

My physical body helped co-construct male narratives such that when asked to reflect upon struggles in their own life experiences, male participants

avoided discussions in order to gain more power and "win." Through our interview negotiations, male interviewees compensated for lack of power by framing their lived experiences as the classic underdog story. They shared brief instances of younger, naïve versions of themselves rising up from unexpected circumstances to reach levels of contentment or success. Working within a familiar field, with personal connections, and gendered power relations, may enable initial access. Across two run-group mornings, I conducted 15 interviews. However, because relationships were already embedded within the social structure, internal access posed challenges. I experienced these challenges interviewing multiple groups. Critically reading my physical body points to inequalities embedded within the interview structures with low socioeconomic, student, and male participants.

Gendered power structures framed each of the student and low socioeconomic interviews. For instance, I interviewed all twenty students in my office on the university campus. Within this office, students saw me dressed in professional clothing and seated next to shelves of books and file folders. Although, I informed them of my role as a graduate student finishing a dissertation, their student perspective still envisioned me as the "instructor" or "professor" of a college class. Clear power structures framed our interactions questioning the extent to which students responded openly as opposed to desirably. Communicating with an elder, academic about their future work

plans, students only presented positive, fearless descriptions of their futures. Moreover, when asked about time, all students assumed they would have more free time in the future. These students constructed nose-to-the-grindstone themed stories about the hardworking, ideal student going to class, completing homework assignments, and studying. The presence of my physical body induced more desirable responses. Similarly, gendered power structures also framed interviews with low socioeconomic participants.

Although I consciously did not dress or adorn myself ornately when interviewing low socioeconomic participants, my physical body still enforced gendered power structures within the interviews. Despite the lack of ornamental excess, my physical presence embodied a life of frivolity. Of the twenty low socioeconomic interviewees, only one earned a college degree. Most participants graduated from high school; although, three participants received their GED. My body represented educational excess. Moreover, my "working" day entailed talking with people about *their* work. Much like the male and student populations, low socioeconomic interviewees responded in desirable ways avoiding negative and intense emotional responses. They tempered their stories with themes of equality, control, and persistence. For these interviewees, life entailed working *some*, playing *some*, and taking care of important life responsibilities *some*. Even when discussing negotiations of unmet expectations, interviewees site instances of turning bad into good. By singing on stage at a

local bar, Christy expressed still feeling a level of satisfaction in living out her dream. Rather than dwell on her feelings of regret, she focused on the positive feelings she now experiences. My body did not hear stories of oppression, overwork, under-payment, or exploitation, themes I expected. Gender and power relations inherent in my physical form, woven into the fabric of each interview, constricted the possibilities of my discoveries within my fieldwork. Even more, my own gender biases and subjectivities further restricted multiple interpretations of the interview and field note texts.

My Subjectivity. For some researchers, exigencies in their own lives lead them to explore particular avenues of research. On one hand, emotional involvement can provide motivation, excitement, and productivity towards a strong research project (Warren, 1988; Lofland & Lofland, 1984). On the other hand, too much personal connection to a research topic may limit the scope and breadth of possibilities explored and discovered. Armed with emotions, researchers further become emotionally connected to their research as they listen to the words of their interview participants describing and discussing everyday, lived experiences. These emotions induce the researcher to identify with some participants/experiences and dis-identify with others (Warren, 1988). My own emotional experiences living as a mid-to-high socioeconomic *perspective* female guided not only my conception of this dissertation project, but also my subsequent questions as well. When I reflect upon my own story, I find

particular biases limiting both my research questions and interpretation of the interview data. I found my own experiences validated; yet, my expectations that these experiences were universally shared by men and women was not supported by my data. Additionally, I expected to see more instances of popular messages from the male and low socioeconomic groups. Also, I expected to hear more about hardships endured by working class participants. The following excerpt illustrates my own life urgencies, problems, and struggles leading to this research study.

> Not long into my first year in graduate school, I came face to face with the challenges married, working mothers experience in managing their work and personal lives. I had struggled maintaining order in house, keeping sane and calm while talking with my children, and saving quality time to spend with my husband. I found myself wondering, "Why is it so hard to be the mother I want to be, the researcher I want to be, and the wife I want to be?" Later that morning, during a class for which I engaged as a TA, the professor, one of my mentors, asked about my apparent dishevelment. When I explained I had a rough morning with my children, papers, and my spouse, he replied, "You know what your problem is? You are trying to focus on having a meaningful career, having a satisfying marriage, being a great mom. Pick two. You can do two of those things well." Upon hearing this, I felt shocked and quickly retorted, "That's unacceptable." I

had grown up believing I could have a meaningful and fulfilling career, and the choice for children and family. Moreover, I knew if I chose to marry and have children, my husband would be my equal, team member, and I would nurture, care for, and teach my children to the best of my ability. Further, I expected to have personal time to focus on me and my needs. I aspired to continue running and planned on running marathons into my fifties or sixties. Dr. Douglas's comment challenged the very core of my graduate school existence. Graduate school was the starting place from which all these other relationships and identities would grow. How can I pick just two? Additional reflection with my mother revealed a startling realization. As I began to justify my expectations she explained, "That's the difference between yours and my generation. You grew up believing you could have it all. I knew I couldn't." Josie shaped expectations early in her life just as I had, but her expectations differed from mine. She never imagined having a career from which she would feel pride and a sense of self-worth. These two conversations, with Dr. Douglas and my mother, ignited my dissertation journey such that I sought to discover who else set expectations like me. Additionally, I wanted to explore why my expectations differed from my mother's. Why did I desire for so much more than she? As I pondered this avenue of inquiry, more questions infiltrated my mind. What do I aspire to do/be?

What are my expectations? From where do they come? Why does my husband not look as frustrated as I do at the end of the day? With these questions and a thirst for answers, a dissertation was born.

My own subjectivities gave birth to this dissertation. I grew up hearing, thinking, and believing I could *have* all these identities and *perform* them in an exceptional way. When I reflect upon the sources, I recall hearing songs ("*I can bring home the bacon, fry it up in pan"*), watching television programs and movies, and seeing magazine pictures epitomizing the successful, career-minded, family-focused, fit and healthy female of the future. Those images represented a life I expected to have and embody. Stories within interview data revealed other mid-to-high socioeconomic *perspective* females share similar expectations. Likewise, interviews from *retrospective* females, similar in age and socioeconomic status to my mother, also echoed and supported my previous assumptions. Because I indentified with these women, we co-constructed narratives supporting preconceived ideas, and, as these same women identified with me, they provided more personal, emotional information. Work-life balance became a significant conversation for these groups of women because they seek out the issue.

Through conversations with mid-to-high socioeconomic females, I helped create a self-fulfilling cycle. In our everyday, life experiences, we know work-life balance is an important issue for us; therefore we seek it out, and through our own negotiations of our working lives, we make it an issue. Much like Lockford

(2004) and Rubin (1976) researching within the field illuminated more about my own experiences and ideologies than it did about my subjects. Interpretations of my fieldwork notes and interview data reflect less on the nature of reality and more on my biography, history, and critical, academic predisposition. Going into the field, I expected to discover both male and female *perspective* struggles as well as an oppressed working class. Instead, I uncovered roots of my own frustrations and identity crisis perpetuating these frustrations. The gendered qualities of my physical space choices and physical body limited my ability to explore alternative experiences and alternative readings. I became bound by my own view of the world, at a particular moment in time. As such, the timing of my research also weighed heavy on the interpretations of these texts.

My Time(ing). This research project began 30 months before its completion. During this time, personal developments along with social exigencies provide useful structures from which to understand data collection and interpretations. This dissertation grew out of three years of rigorous, graduate course work in which learning to balance teaching, class, and writing work loads nearly destroyed my personal relationships and physical health. Not surprisingly, at that moment in time, my most pressing issues were how to perform better and squeeze more hours out of the day. Socially, our economy was thriving; unemployment rates were rarely discussed and employees felt safe to discuss issues of work-life balance in the work place. Over the course of the

next two years, my life stresses changed and the national economy began receding. Within the student interviews collected during the first year of dissertation research, material concerns for big houses, expensive hobbies, and free time excess emerged. Had I collected these interviews during the second year as students watched their parents lose jobs and investments in the stock market, themes may have emerged differently. Students may have cared more about retirement accounts and job security. Likewise, most *perspective* and *retrospective* interviews occurred during the second year as my intense emotionality decreased. I could relate to the emotional, mid-to-high socioeconomic female interviewees because I remembered those feelings of guilt as a working mother. However, I remained emotionally distant for other interviews because I was not in the midst of self-struggle. Thus, my gender and timing *both* provide a useful frame from which to view this research.

The inescapable nature of gender, power, and time question the core tenants of validity and reliability in my own and other academic research projects (Baxter & Beebe, 2004). I dove into the field searching for answers to personal and social questions, constructing a valid research design in breadth and depth hoping to collect reliable responses. Coming out, I collected multiple interpretations; multiple truths. Recognizing my own subjectivities not only raised my awareness of the impact of *self* within the research process, but also encouraged me to get outside of my *self* in my analysis. This final analytical

chapter offers support for notions of local truths as opposed to universal Truth. Through this dissertation, I discovered multiple interpretations of work-life enactments and construals of time. On the one hand, I drew specific conclusions highlighting similarities and differences in enactments and construals of time based on the shared stories presented during interviews. On the other hand, I turned the interviews inside out to explore the role I played in co-constructing these same narratives. The end result provided me with an interesting, rich interpretation of the ways people construct, negotiate, and manage their work and personal time. Although some interviewees question the imperfect timing of their life experiences, all participants admitted they still would not trade their life for another. In the end, these stories represent the exciting, painful, embarrassing, moving, and hopeful accounts of the times of their lives.

Chapter Six:

Time after Time: Concluding thoughts

"I have a brain, and I want o use it."

Lisa, 37 year-old mother of two children

"Standing in my kitchen, I began asking myself, 'Why do they feel so frustrated? Why are we so disappointed by the way our lives have turned out?' Then it hit me. It's about our identity. We consumed these messages and thought we would not only HAVE these things (impressive career, strong marriage, nurturing relationship with children, nice wardrobe, and fit bodies), but we also thought we would BE these things. We formulated our identities based upon the messages we consumed. Now, we feel frustrated because we are not all that we thought we would be. We are having an identity crisis."

Sunshine, 35 year-old mother of two children

The findings of this dissertation offer on the one hand a glimpse into real issues organizational members experience managing and negotiating their work and their personal time. On the other hand, conclusions from this dissertation also highlight the need for solutions to these problems. While this chapter does not suggest specific solutions to help students and working professionals grapple with the challenges confronting them, the following pages do develop implications discussed earlier in the previous chapters. Discussing these implications helps to not only flesh out the findings more fully and shed light on potential work-life effects, but also hint at potential ways to solve struggles people encounter. Specifically, themes of integration-separation, "work-life balance" construct, unconscious nature of popular messages, and identity offer interesting and useful lenses through which to see larger, social implications of research findings. As a result, this chapter also explores future research ideas.

Because the research questions resonated with interview participants, and stories were so readily available to participants, future research should continue to investigate how popular messages shape expectations and current experiences of work-life time, ideas explored later in this chapter. Past research has made progress in advancing conceptions and understanding of work-life experiences; however, real, lived experiences challenge past research.

While Kirby et al. (2003) question notions of work and personal boundaries, interview data suggests organization members still recognize these two realms as separate. Academically, scholars point to the "reality" that our worlds have blurred; that traditional boundaries of work and home or public/private no longer exist. We work at home and live at work. Likewise, the use of technology blurs traditional lines even more (Boradfoot, 2001). Even though interview participants acknowledged the use of technology to either integrate or segment their worlds of paid and unpaid work, these organizational members still frame their lives as "work" and "life." People recognize different spheres and tend to these realms differently. Working individuals experience two different worlds of paid and unpaid work. Moreover, men and women experience the blending and blurring of these worlds differently. Despite engaging in the same activities that blur the boundaries between paid and unpaid work, men and women still frame these experiences differently. This

difference in framing may account for gender differences in the perceptions of workload and stress.

Although women reported feeling more balance by integrating paid and unpaid work, women still reported, in this research as well as other research projects, feeling more stress and frustration than their male counterparts. These women may feel more stress because they perceive their worlds of "work" and "life" so inextricably linked. The men, by segmenting their realms, perceive to keep "work at work and home at home." These men conceive of paid and unpaid work as occurring in different locations and times. They can enter, exit, or escape when necessary because they separate their worlds. On the contrary, by integrating "work" and "life," women continually contemplate their struggles of both simultaneously. They never experience a break or reprieve because they "work" all the time. Furthermore, integrating realms opens up the need for issues like balance. Because women experience the challenges of stress, despite attempting to integrate in order to alleviate stress, they seek out alternative experiences, understandings, and options. For these women, notions of "balance" become appealing as they examine their life out of balance. Ironically, the women experiencing this lack of balance can afford to integrate their lives. Integration as a strategy highlights socioeconomic differences in perceptions of work, life, and paid and unpaid work. Only people who can financially afford to work from home, work in flexible careers, or use communication technologies for

work activities can "enjoy" the benefits of integration. Integration stems from a privilege position, encourages the social construction of "work-life balance" (WLB), and perpetuates the use of the term WLB which further complicates identity struggles mid-to-high socioeconomic women face. The following section will develop each of these claims more fully beginning with the notion that integration exists only for organizational members who can financially afford to blur their lines of paid and unpaid work.

Time to Focus. Integration as a strategy for achieving balance assumes organizational members have the opportunities and finances to do so. Low socioeconomic women must segment paid and unpaid work because their jobs occur in real spaces, during real time. Few low paying jobs offer flexibility to work from home or use communication technologies to accomplish work at home. Broadfoot's notion of a "workaholics heaven and hell" (2001, p. 113) created by the use of communication technologies only speaks to mid-to-high socioeconomic organizational members. The need to address time spent on paid versus unpaid work at home grows out of the recognition that these activities are occurring within the same time and space. Until the Internet and development of communication technologies, mediated messages picturing work and personal time segmented activities. Organizational members did not recognize the simultaneous accomplishment of both paid and unpaid work until their lived experiences illustrated the potential. Thus, WLB as a construct emerges from the

integrated experiences of middle and upper class organizational members, particularly for the integrated experiences of women.

WLB resonates and only has meaning for mid-to-high socioeconomic professionals. For low socioeconomic workers, life entails engaging in paid and unpaid work responsibilities and leisure time. Low socioeconomic organizational members frame these activities as *life* not work-life balance. Notions of work, life, and balance stem from a financial position of privilege looking for alternatives and options away from current life experiences. Through social interactions, mid-to-high socioeconomic females validate each others' lived experiences, and together, they search for an alternative. The alternative exists with work and life in balance. Because their experiences are not *what they ordered*, an alternative must exist. WLB provides the alternative way to live, and books, web sites, television shows, and movies supply messages and images on how to do it. These women consume these messages consciously hoping to learn how to better live a life of balance. Consuming these messages, either consciously or unconsciously, interpolates organizational members to seek certain identities, ideas explored next.

You Are What You Eat. As products and processes, popular messages shape expectations and identities for those who consume them. A book, television advertisement, or web site constructs a local knowledge and truth for what might be or should be. These "products" help shape consumers'

conceptions of self and views about the world. McGee (1998) points outs the connection between rhetoric, ideology, and the post-modern world of fragmentation suggestion issues and struggles not only shape identities for consumers, but they also enter into the world of the hyperreal once these messages become mass mediated. These messages become magnified and represent a web of meaning much greater than their surface appears. For instance, as organizational members consume books on leadership or time management strategies, they begin to embody the ideals stemming from the books. These ideas not only represent an identity for the members, but also a larger *corporate ideal* for them to embody. Moreover, these members select particular texts because the messages reinforce their identities. These organizational members define themselves according to the language within the texts (i.e. "I am a good leader"). However, even less conscious efforts in consuming popular messages have the ability to shape members' identities.

Watching television for leisure, reading internet stories, finding AOL's latest sports updates all contribute to identity formation. The messages organizational members consume influence their expectations of who they are and how they will live their lives. Mid-to-high socioeconomic females struggle with WLB because they struggle embodying the multiple identities they expect to exhibit. Consuming texts on marital strength, child rearing, physical fitness, and intellectual prowess constructs multiple, potentially competing, identities

which become difficult to fully embody. As a result, these women become frustrated by their lack of fulfillment. While the male participants in this study did not express the negative emotionality the females expressed, they did express emotionality through their bouts of laughter. Most likely, the men also suffer from an identity crisis; however, due to gender characteristics already discussed in chapter five, the participants did not hint at an identity crisis like the females. Moving forward with this line of research, a diverse research team in gender, age, race, and socioeconomics may elicit more reliable data. The following final section addresses additional areas for future research.

With More Time. Because this current project illustrates intense struggles experienced by organizational members, additional research can help not only shed additional light on their experiences, but also work to solve these problems working individuals face. Struggles with WLB exist with real people, in real time, and in real physical spaces. More research on these struggles can further illuminate these struggles. Likewise, more research can enhance the validity and reliability of this current study. Male and low socioeconomic organizational members offered counter-intuitive and questionable responses. With a more diverse research team, participants may answer with more honesty and less "desirability." Also, deconstructing the actual popular messages or texts may provide additional insight into expectations and identities. Specifically,

exploring the historical origins of the WLB construct may provide additional insight into the social construction of realities.

In the end, more research may help *real* organizational members struggling with *real* life problems. This line of research strives to make a measureable impact on the lives of organizational members; however, this end goal has not been met. Hopefully, additional research will provide solutions and suggestions for how to live a better, more fulfilling life, which seems like a shared goal of many organizational members. When time eventually runs out, and people reflect upon their lives, much like the popular musical band Green Day, "I hope you had the time of your life."

Appendix A

Interview Protocol
Prospective Interviews

1. Tell me your future work-life story. What do you think you will be doing? What does life look like? What do you look like? How will you be spending your time?

2. What expectations do you have? For work? For careers? For personal life? For family? For yourself?

3. Where do you think these expectations come from? Why do you have these expectations? What do you think of them?

4. What does work-life balance mean to you? How do you define it? Tell me that story.

5. Is work-life balance achievable? How? What will you need to do to achieve it?

6. How do you define leisure? What does leisure time mean to you? Do you get enough?

7. Describe for me your dream or ideal job? What does that look like? What will you be doing?

8. How does that dream job connect to WLB? Do you see yourself having both? How?

Appendix B

Interview Protocol
Perspective Interviews

1. Tell me your work-life story? Describe what happens everyday in your work-life experiences? When do you feel the most strain? How?

2. How is this/are these similar to what you expected? How different? What did you expect?

3. Where do you think these expectations came from? Why do you have these expectations? What do you think of them?

4. What does work-life balance mean to you? How do you define it? Tell me that story.

5. Is work-life balance desirable? Achievable? How? Where do you turn for help?

6. How do you define leisure? What does leisure time mean to you? Do you get enough?

7. Why do you work? Has this always been the case?
   Is this your dream job? Describe for me your dream or ideal job? What does that look like? What would you be doing?

8. How does that dream job connect to WLB? Do you see yourself having both? Why? How?

Appendix C

Interview Protocol
Retrospective Interviews

1. Tell me your work-life story? Describe what happens everyday in your work-life experiences? When do you feel the most strain? How?

2. How is this/are these similar to what you expected? How different? What did you expect?

3. Where do you think these expectations came from? Why do you have these expectations? What do you think of them?

4. What does work-life balance mean to you? How do you define it? Tell me that story. Is work-life balance desirable? Achievable? How?

5. How is all this different from your views/experience 20 years ago? What did WLB mean then? Describe work then. Describe the difference between then and now. Where did/do you turn for help?

6. How do you define leisure? What does leisure time mean to you? Do you get enough?

7. Why do you work? Has this always been the case?
   Is this your dream job? Describe for me your dream or ideal job? What does that look like? What would you be doing?

8. How does that dream job connect to WLB? Do you see yourself having both? Why? How?

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